





AS ONCE  
YOU WERE

Books by  
A. S. M. Hutchinson

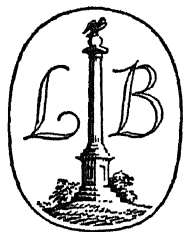
THE HAPPY WARRIOR  
ONCE ABOARD THE LUGGER —  
THE CLEAN HEART  
IF WINTER COMES  
THIS FREEDOM  
THE EIGHTH WONDER  
AND OTHER STORIES  
ONE INCREASING PURPOSE  
THE UNCERTAIN TRUMPET  
THE BOOK OF SIMON  
BIG BUSINESS  
THE SOFT SPOT  
AS ONCE YOU WERE



# AS ONCE YOU WERE

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A. S. M. Hutchinson



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1938

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It creeps into your mind, you find it there.  
You are my poem then, for in my heart  
Lovelier than a sonnet, you made rhyme  
And I had memorized you unaware.

CHRISTOPHER MORLEY



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PART ONE

He Makes Ready





# Chapter I

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QUAILE? Why Quaile, wherever it may be, of all places? Piers Exceat would be asked when this absurd "retirement" of his began to be known.

Exceat would give in reply the impression that it was because that backwatered West of England market-town was of his favourite haunts; but it was his memories, not his current leisures, that had a fondness for dropping in there from time to time; and he was in these days greatly occupied with a certain aspect of his memories.

Prior to his visits made in preparation of now settling there he had in fact only once before in his life been to Quaile, and that but for a single night, and that so many as nearly forty years ago. On the opening day of that vacation bicycle-tour on which he had collected material for writing the first of his innumerable books he had ridden into Quaile; and the spacious square which is the town's heart, Marketplace as it is called, had made, as he entered it, so entrancing an impression on the freshness of mind which then was his that he had alighted abruptly and looked all about him, enchanted. "Straight out of a Ran-

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dolph Caldecott picture-book" his thought had been; and in the smoking-room of the Quaile Arms that evening, eagerly setting about the first pages he had ever written for print, it was by its immediate instinct for that Caldecott simile, as a clever hunter the instinctive motions for a correct jump, that his swift pen had first discovered to him its facile paces.

Graced by those associations, mellowed by time, that Caldecott picture — its bow-fronted shops, its half-timbered houses, its fine old coaching-inn, its cobbled thoroughfares divided by its market-pitch, its pound, its ancient pump, its stocks — had remained compellingly in Exceat's mind all down the years. When first, back among the fifties of his books, the notion of retirement with his hundredth had come into his mind, Quaile, simultaneously, had occupied the project. When the nineties were reached, and what had been little better than an amiable speculation had become a resolved, a rapidly consummating, intention, Quaile, which similarly had been but a day-dream, became a definite objective.

And Exceat was at work upon his believed to be ninety-ninth volume when, with thrill that contained every concomitant of augury, of magic and of supernatural design, he chanced upon on the back page of the *Times* a sale advertisement of "Island House, Quaile."

The diction of estate-agents, deplorable to the sensitive taste, may well be as of silver trumpets when, as in this

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case, every phrase stirs up an ardent wish, long cherished.

Bijou Queen Anne residence of character and charm. Uniquely occupying island site in road-fork, the property comprises some seven acres of garden and woodland enclosed by fine old wall . . . stream . . . outbuildings . . . Amazing freehold sacrifice, £4,000. Harry Hay, Marketplace, Quaile.

"Island House." What a name! All his days he had hankered after an island, a desert island, of his own. "Fine old wall." He could imagine it, grey, lichened, enclosing this island residence to its owner's romantic solitude as might the sea. "Stream . . . woodlands . . . outbuildings" — veritably the place must be, *was*, the island of his life's desire!

He grabbed for letter-paper and pen.

In the week-end he was down at Quaile, appointment made with Mr. Harry Hay.

Arriving at the Quaile Arms late on the Friday night, conducted at once to his room by the proprietor, a large uncommunicative man who made a point of the fact that he had sat up for him, it was not till the morning, quickly from bed for the purpose, that he looked again upon Marketplace, held in his memory's eye for nearly forty years.

Straight out of a Randolph Caldecott picture-book! In

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the gay light of an April's sunshine, newly washed by rain, its cobbles, roofs and frontages gleamed with the freshness of fresh paint; and looking upon it he had suddenly one of those visitations from his past in the possible significance of which he was nowadays so profoundly interested. For there was thrown up into his consciousness, clearly as if he held it before him, the picture at which, with thrill, he had opened the Caldecott book given him on a childhood birthday. He had not thought of that, or of any, particular picture when first he had coined that phrase for this place. Vivid in every line and colour, selfsame in its varnishy-papery smell, it suddenly now was in his senses; and because of the call in him towards interests of days now very far behind him, because of that theory of his that a man's past happier selves can be released, his present self purged, rejuvenated in them, his affections went out anew to Marketplace which thus had released and delivered to him this forgotten figment of their time.

But Marketplace, as he explored it in the half-hour between breakfast and his appointment with Mr. Harry Hay, presented to him again, at every pace, delights which, founded in his early sensibilities, had suffered no forgetting. All his life there had persisted in Exceat a boyhood entertainment in the windows of certain kinds of shops: a saddler's, a gunsmith's, an ironmonger's, the old-fashioned sort of grocery. Men at such windows feast an eye much different from the eye that women tantalize outside cos-

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tumiers' or jewellers'. The woman as she gazes covets; the man, consciously or subconsciously, is boy again, reading romantic stories from the wares as does young Raleigh in Millais' picture from the earringed sailor's lips.

And here in Marketplace Exceat found these feasts of the imagination framed in settings, all bow-windowed, all with the air of having been here, father to son, for generations, and standing in a sequestered serenity — persons and vehicles in all the wide square few enough to be counted on the fingers — such as, carrying him back, made him, somehow, consciously boy.

This saddler's: bits, bridles, saddles, crops; massive harnessing for massive shire horses; whips, yokes, bells, medallions of heavy brass. This gunsmith's: those gleaming barrels, polished stocks; that rook-rifle, those cartridges, that little sporting-gun, those game-bags, those — now, what the dickens? — ah, ferret-lines and ferret-muzzles. This iron-monger's: gleaming spades and picks and felling-axes; carpentry tools of every size and kind; hedge-hooks, grouters, scythes; sheath-knives, pocket-knives, pruning-shears. This grocer's —

But when Exceat, enchantedly drifting along from shop to shop, boy in every particle of him, came to the proud chief grocery on Marketplace he knew at once that no grocer's house was this. This — these bulging bow-windows, stoutly ribbed — veritably was the great stern-cabin of an East Indiaman bearing out of the Indies these teas and

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coffees and spices, these gingers and chutneys and fruits, with which it was freighted.

"In argosy transferred —" How did those lines go? And standing there before a gleaming actuality of their loveliness, delightedly he recalled them:

Candied apple, quince and plum and gourd;  
With jellies soother than the creamy curd,  
And lucent syrups, tinct with cinnamon;  
Manna and dates in argosy transferred  
From Fez; and spiced dainties, every one  
From silken Samarcand to cedared Lebanon.

Deeply he indrew his breath. When in his youth he first was discovering beauty such as that in literature there would possess him a rapture having the nature almost of ecstatic trance. He would feel himself, it could have been said, aswoon almost, as though the imagery presented to him were some drug, lifting him out of his body into some nirvana of the senses; but were that told him of himself, "No, come off it," he would have laughed. "I'm too earthy for that sort of language ever to have described me. What it was with me in those days was that the stuff, when I came suddenly and newly upon it, would fill me right up and flowing over with, with exultation; would make me — here, I've got it — sick with happiness." And he would have shaken his head in his droll way and said "Alack, not now. 'There was a time when meadow, grove and stream —' and

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so on; my word, there was. Alack, no longer; irresponsible now, urgeless, numb . . .”

But he was coming down here to Quaile to cure all that, to get back into the selves which had possessed the other; and already, in these two hours since his getting out of bed in Quaile, had come from his past, first that Caldecott picture, then these joys before these shops, now, rapturously almost of old, a flooding in his heart at loveliness of poetry's imagery.

He drew deep breath. “Jove, I'm happy,” he thought; and then, with eyes recovering the great bow-windows, “East Indiaman — islands — Island House. Where's this Harry Hay?”

The offices of Mr. Harry Hay, Estate Agent and Auctioneer, very easily found by their riot of bills each rendering HARRY HAY in as it were a blood-red shout, had nothing at all in keeping with the air of Marketplace, much less with Samarcand or Lebanon. Always ready with a laugh at himself, Exceat long enjoyed one in relating with what old-world charm he had invested the premises of his morning saunter and how violently disruptive of such was his experience in the only establishment he actually entered.

A single room divided by a match-board partition comprised the offices of Harry Hay; and it was the pleasure of Mr. Hay, reversing the usual practice in such accom-

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modation, to relegate the inner compartment to his clerk, Ashby, the outer to his own use, entry to him in which from the street was quite unnecessarily announced by a large clapper bell affixed above the door and operated by its opening. This bell, which would have served creditably as tocsin over area as wide as a mediæval banqueting hall, in the narrow compass of Mr. Harry Hay's cabinet performed its office, neck outstretched from a large coil spring, with strong suggestion of the goose in the fairy-tale crying "Master, master, thieves, thieves!"; and on the occasion of Exceat's entry (from silken Samarcand) added to the start which its unexpected cries already had given him by carrying its devotion to the point of leaping from its perch as far towards its master as it could wing, narrowly missing Exceat's ducked head in its flight, and there expiring, tongue outstretched, martyr to its own zeal.

"Bell, Ashby!" heartily declaimed the object of this devotion who, plump and rosy, telephone to ear, sat at a desk onto which every variety of correspondence together with ledgers, portfolios and house-keys appeared to have been tipped from a barrow. "Bell down again."

This highly superfluous information was directed, as Exceat later inferred, to pass through a hatch or ventilator high up in the match-board partition to the clerk beyond, it being a practice of Mr. Harry Hay thus to co-operate at intervals with his assistant and a practice of the hidden



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Ashby never, in Exceat's observation, either by word or movement to reply.

Nodding, beaming and grimacing at Exceat in the pantomime of apology commonly staged for third parties by persons engaged on the telephone, Mr. Harry Hay now suddenly transfixed this pantomime to ejaculate, as if stung, "Number engaged?" Heartily calling then "Number engaged, Ashby. Ring him again, Ashby," he replaced the receiver with a deft toss and turned to greet Exceat with the exuberant earnestness of a religious revivalist welcoming a convert to the rich grace awaiting him on the platform.

"Mr. Exceat, of course? Sit down, Mr. Exceat, sit down. I got your letter and no doubt you got mine (Property-ledger, Ashby, property-ledger!) and here we are all set and ready for you." And exuberantly throwing the chaos of his desk this way and that into greater chaos yet, Mr. Harry Hay dragged forth a large volume, view-halloed "Found her, Ashby, found her!" and whipping over the leaves with strong suggestion of a huntsman bustling hounds, stopped with gay cry of "Island House; here we are!" and proceeded then to declaim particulars (the whole of which with a single exception he had already given by letter at that moment in Exceat's pocket) with the air and the emphasis of one gazing into a treasure-chest and startled by what he saw. "*Three* sits. *Six* bed. *Bath*, H. and C. *Commodious* box and cupboard room," cried Mr. Harry

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Hay; and finally, as one fairly staggered by the discovery, "C. on P.!"

"What's C. on P.?" Exceat inquired.

"Caretaker on prem.," explained Mr. Harry Hay, flushed. "Put in by the vendors at my suggestion when they did the place up. This property, Mr. Exceat, I'll tell you about this property. (Take 'phone calls, Ashby. Take 'phone calls.) This property stood empty years, the owner residing abroad. *He* died, out there on the Riviera somewhere, St. Raphael or St. Michael or some such place. (Ashby! Where was it exactly, Ashby, old Mr. Lawrence died?)"

"It doesn't matter," suggested Exceat.

"Not in the least," cordially agreed Mr. Harry Hay. "Doesn't matter, Ashby, doesn't matter. As I was saying *he* died wherever it was and dear old Barley Johnston across the square here — solicitor, you follow me, acting for the executors — dear old Barley Johnston came in here to me and 'Harry,' he said — he's known me, of course, since I was a boy — 'Harry, what shall I do about selling this Island House place?' he said. 'Do it up,' I said, just like that, flat, no hesitation. 'Do it up. Put it into good repair where it wants it, install a caretaker to air and dust and what-not, and I'll sell you that property before you've paid your decorator's bill,' I said. 'When a prospective views a house, Mr. Johnston,' I told him, 'there's nothing disfavours him more than mustiness and emptiness and what-

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Main

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not, and nothing that predisposes him more than air and life and someone to open the door to him when he goes to view.' Dear old Barley, he's slow sometimes, old-fashioned, you know, but he saw that like a flash, like a flash. (Remember, Ashby, how quick with my Island House plan Mr. Barley Johnston was that day when he came in? Day that chap fell off a ladder next door here, Ashby?) *He* did the place up, marvellously, oh marvellously; three coats of paint, new floors, new kitchening and what-not, and *I* put in as caretaker this really excellent body — cook, housekeeper, that sort of thing if you should happen to want one — this Miss — Miss — (Ashby! What's her name, Ashby, that caretaker of ours at Island House? Something to do with a table-cloth, Ashby.) Ah, Baize. (Baize, Ashby, I've remembered it now.) Miss Baize. *She* —"

"Well, all I want to do," broke in Exceat, by unhappy experience marking his man for the type interview with whom if not felled as with a hatchet in the bud will paralyze as ivy a tree, and getting therefore decisively to his feet, "is to see the place. She'll be expecting me, this Miss Baize?"

"She'll be waiting for you," asserted Mr. Harry Hay, springing also to his feet, stumbling over the bell and sweeping it behind him with an obviously well-accustomed movement of the foot. "Ashby shall take you round. (Island House with Mr. Exceat, Ashby, sharp! Drop what you're

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doing and spring along, Ashby!) I'd take you myself but most unfortunately I—"

Agog to be off to see the house, Exceat, to accelerate the spring-along process of his conductor, opened the door from which the mute Ashby necessarily must spring and looked within. The apartment was unoccupied.

"There's no one here," he announced, his face droll expression of his own surprise and amused anticipation of Mr. Harry Hay's.

"Hardly ever is," cheerfully agreed Mr. Harry Hay, peering in now beside him and surprised in no degree whatsoever. "Popped out and I never noticed him go. Never knew such a chap for popping out so silently. On business, of course; on business. Rare honest worker that lad. I got him from—"

Exceat, backing away, had opened now the street door. "I'd just as soon go up alone, matter of fact," he said. "If the place is what I imagine it to be I'll want to poke around quite a bit, and better on my own. Is it far?"

"It's two miles," announced Mr. Harry Hay following Exceat through the door and standing with him now on the pavement without. "It's exactly and precisely two measured certified miles from that cross in the centre of the square there. It's on the main Fulchester road straight up the north side here, and there, plumb opposite the gate, is the milestone 'Quaile 2 Miles.'"

For reasons which he considered it was highly improb-

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able would be comprehended of Mr. Harry Hay, and which, as further encouraging the ivy tentacles of his garbularity, he certainly did not propose to tell him, Exceat's heart, receiving this information, pulsed for Island House anew. His own milestone! Outside his very gate! "I'll go straight along," he said, severing at the root a history of the unfortunate laying-up of his car ("At dear old Charley Bright's garage over there") which Mr. Harry Hay now was planting. But as he turned away there caught his eye, leaning against the window of the office, that which jumped irresistibly into unison with his mind's delight in milestones and island houses.

"That your bike?" he asked.

Mr. Harry Hay laughed exuberantly. "Can't see myself on a push-bike, no," he declared. "Too much push for too little go for my avoidupoiseage. No, that's Ashby's." He looked upon Exceat, as Cortez' men one upon the other, with a wild surmise. "You'd never want to ride out on that, would you?"

"I've not been on a bike," said Exceat, "for thirty years, and if I come to live here the very first thing I'm going to do is to buy one. I'd like to get onto that above anything."

"You get on," said Mr. Harry Hay stoutly. "Any sort of ride is better than walking, that I agree. Look, there's his trouser-clips on the bell. What a start, though, for Ashby when he finds it gone! Teach him what popping out'll lead to, eh?"

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And highly amused with this genial prospect Mr. Harry Hay looked this way and that for its victim while Exceat, thrilled as a sailor who after long absence snuffs again the sea, led bike to roadway, put leg over saddle, and with push from the kerb into balance and into movement pedalled away.

## Chapter II

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PIERS EXCEAT when he put down his pen, left London and retired into private life at Quail, was in the fifty-fifth year of his age and was the author of one hundred and eleven books. He had believed himself, when writing the one hundred and eleventh, to be the author of but ninety-nine; and it was with a high exultancy that he sped through what he imagined to be his hundredth contribution to his sum, because, as has been said, long ago, right back in the early fifties of his works, he had decided that with his hundredth he would down pen and retire. Grievous therefore was his chagrin when, this believed to be the hundredth finished and despatched to its publisher, he counted up his issued works again, just for the thrill of the thing, and found them to total not ninety-nine but one hundred and ten.

Ten books ago, eleven counting this last, he might have retired! Of all the —!

The droll mortification of this devastating discovery upon his pleasant face, he presents himself, the October evening of its occurrence, seated at his writing-table in his Bloomsbury upper-part, as, judged by figure and by looks,

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decidedly a younger man than commonly his years will produce. His age, indeed, had a variable quality, well known to his friends, of whom he had a wide circle. Thus when at exercise or when moving about a room with a certain quick manner that he had, he was at most a youthful forty-five. When in meditation, and it was a characteristic of his that he could sit absorbed in his thoughts as another man in a book, there would come about his eyes and mouth the lines which perhaps should permanently have belonged to them. He was in fact, when thus absorbed, engaged upon certain philosophies that he had, and he looked then a much older man. Normally his face, noways striking, had an attractiveness about it, his voice also an engaging quality; and he had further a droll turn of speech, a something diffident way of presenting a comic side to a thing, with which this pleasant quality of his voice well attuned. His hands, brown and thin, had a capability about them; his figure and his air a kind of finish; his clothes, well cut though invariably well worn, always suited him.

He is to be seen in a word as no better than the type of man who would be of the picture in any company of pleasant people at a luncheon-party, say, or in a club-room corner. The pleasing impression made by such a gathering on the casual observer is caused by contribution, each various but all in tone, from each member of the group; and Exceat is suggested to us, in an estimate addressed to him by one whom he was shortly to meet in Quaile and who was vitally to affect his life, as one made



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up similarly of a mingling of attributes each in keeping, none pronounced.

An "Ish" man this friend — a young girl — was to tell him that he was; and when smilingly desired to explain what manner of man precisely was an Ish, "Why, not tall, tallish; not brown, brownish; not young, youngish; and all like that" he was told. To which finally may be added this, said of him by another friend, also youthful also of Quaille, but of male sex: that if, to make an inquiry or to render oneself known, one went up rather diffidently to a group of strangers of whom Piers Exceat was one his was the face to which instinctively you would address yourself.

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At the moment his face (as we have seen) mirrors his thoughts on the miscalculation which would never of course have happened had he enshrined upon his shelves, as all proud authors do, complete collection of his works. Any fool, much more any admiring parent, any fond creator, can count his chickens after they are hatched and when glittered in ranks before his nose. But Piers Exceat, though abundantly indeed an author, was not a proud author. If sundry of his works were to be seen here and there upon his shelves it was in no degree because he cherished them but solely for the reason that, at the moment of their arrival within his walls, fresh — and free — from their publishers, there had happened to be no other means — no chance caller, no

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aunt, no charwoman, no itinerant bargainer of potted plants — of disposing of them. Into one convenient vacancy or another they would be shoved and there remain, forgotten.

For it was not with the complacency of the proud novelist, much less with such great one's untouchable or touchy self-esteem, that Piers Exceat regarded his pen. He regarded it with a whimsical friendliness such as may be given towards an amusing freak of one's household or of one's acquaintance, towards a comic dog, a precocious urchin or a licensed family retainer. And the books he made with it, or rather, such was its uncanny ease, the books which of its own volition (he was in the habit of saying) it made for him, were not books of the sort by which public notoriety, hence proper pride, is won but books which, termed "Popular," arouse or further the popularity of their subjects, not of their writers.

Whensoever happened something that aroused the public interest — aroused it either newly, as flying, as wireless, as hiking; or aroused it anew where it had always browsed, as the outbreak of a war, the uprising of a dictator, the death of a monarch, the toppling of a throne — Piers Exceat rushed out a book about it. And whensoever a publisher desired quickly and efficiently a new edition of an old guide-book; and whensoever himself discovered a quarter of the British Isles lacking a guide-book, or, combining pleasure with business, took holiday abroad in foreign resort similarly circumstanced — whensoever arose any of such

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contingencies: again that easy knack of pleasant writing again a volume rushed to Press.

Authorship of this kind was the career into which young Piers Exceat had broken from the Civil Service stool on which, not long before, he had started life. Trying his hand one summer bicycling-vacation, on a small local guide-book at friendly suggestion of the proprietor of the district newspaper, whose son was a fellow C.S. clerk, young Piers had made, in his patron's opinion, rather an unusual thing of it. "You've got a pen for this kind of thing; you ought to use it," he was commended; and the idea of such a means of livelihood, if means it could be made, immensely appealed to the boy: his own master, punting about on his bike by himself—he had even in those days an odd hankering for solitude—exercising the easy flow of ink which he found himself to command, this was delectable contrast to the stereotyped restraint of office life. "Do you really think so? By Jove, I'd like to." A letter of introduction went with a copy of the little book from the newspaper-owner to a London publishing house. Young Piers was invited to amuse his off-hours by rewriting a guide-book which it was felt might be worth reissue if touched-up. Again the something-unusual quality was produced. In few years Piers Exceat—pleasantly accommodated in a set of rooms on a Bloomsbury upper floor—was established and was rapidly progressing, not, as it was his habit to declare, as an author, but as a maker of books.

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It becomes understandable, surely, how easily one here, another there, a third around the corner, might be overlooked by their author when seeking to render to himself a tally of the whole. If forgotten by him even when occupying one time convenient vacancies upon his shelves, how much more abysmally slid from his recollection, at this hour of ranging up the ninety and nine, were books possible of recall only by a hunt through records—correspondence files, diaries, bank pass-books and the like—or by some errant freak of memory?

Research of the former kind had produced the neatly-written list of ninety-and-nine titles which had caused Exceat when composing it to suppose himself at work upon his hundredth; it was freak of memory, freak as unaccountable as dismaying, which, while exultingly he conned over his schedule preparatory to adding now, in red ink, "And No. 100 and Last . . ." suddenly produced to him two more which he had entirely forgotten. Staggered, laying down the pen ready-dipped in the red pot, with *tchk* of vexation he was about to add the truant titles Nos. 100 and 101, making now one hundred and two in all, when with horrid shock he recollected, at a blow, three further. Three. One hundred and four before this last. One hundred and infernal five in all. Not two books ago but five books ago he had done his hundredth, reached his aim, and could have stopped. He sat, pen poised, scarce daring to breathe. If he so much as drew breath this abominable tilt of his memory, tilted yet further, would land him, he had the mis-

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giving, with yet another exposure of forgotten fatherhood, with twins again as like as not; with triplets, who knew? He reached for his pipe and the movement brought about yet worse. Quads. That series for Dunstable's; forgotten absolutely; four of them. Yes, four; and five and four are nine; one hundred and infernal nine; nine books ago he might have —

Within the half-hour, aroused now to toothcomb scrape of memory and of records, he had rounded up yet other twain. When quite certainly, all possibilities exhausted, he knew there could be no more, he filled fresh pipe, pushed back chair from the table at which these calamitous disclosures had been made and for a while, smoking, sat there ruefully grinning at himself. One hundred and eleven . . . Minted anew by his intensive scheduling of them, they began to pass in their long trail — here as paper-covered brochure at sixpence, there as sumptuous affair in figured boards, thick paper, copiously illustrated, twelve and six, fifteen shillings — before his mental eyes; and as he watched them there arose about their file, as dust thrown up by marching feet, visions whereat gradually the mocking of himself upon his face passed from his face.

He saw the ardent stripling, eager-browed, by whom had been written that forgotten book, and that and that; and saw beside him the home faces, this long time no more, agleam with pride in his success. He saw with this book and with this and this the places, the chance circumstances, the chance friends attendant on their making. He saw these

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done even in the war years during his convalescences when twice wounded. He saw these, these and these, pressing one upon the other in the long passage since the war, their circumstances with them. He saw Jack.

His marriage with Jack (as he had always called her) had been in the year after the armistice and had been of duration shorter even than the proposed length of their honeymoon. Within three weeks she had been caught by pneumonia and was dead; in one and the same month he had been bachelor, benedick and widower.

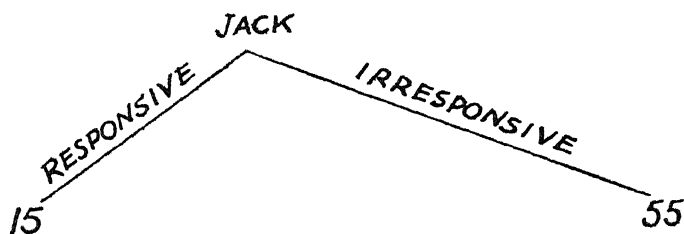
This was a concentration of emotional experience which, it would be supposed, could not but leave a mark upon one called upon to undergo it; but Exceat, met a year or two later, betrayed, on the surface, no such mark. He appeared, as one or two said, to have "quite forgotten her," and in a sense this was true; of active memory of Jack his mind, within little more than the first anniversary of her death, was free. But this was in fact because his mind, overcharged, could not endure its grief. Physical pain, sufficiently increased, will reach a point at which it can no longer be felt. Overloaded, the nerves conveying it to the brain cease their office, or the brain, overcharged with the torture conveyed to it, ceases to register; a numbness supervenes.

And similarly it had been with Exceat in the emotional anguish of that honeymoon with Jack. Too great to be borne, the intensity of those brief days between his first night beside her and his burial of her at Palma in Majorca speedily had been transmuted by Nature's adaptive proc-

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esses into as it were a rapture of his imagination only; an episode inconceivable to him, alike in the loveliness of its opening and in the calamity of its end, of having been actually experienced; and gradually it had passed thence, time's dimming passage overlaying its hues, into a remote obscurity of his consciousness, into some recondite fastness of the citadel of his mind, penetrated only in rare dreams from which he would awake to hear his voice crying "Jack, Jack!"

Nevertheless, "I date from Jack" he sometimes, in recent years, would say to friends who had known her; and looking upon her now, not in dream but in conscious mental image in the procession of his books, he took up a pencil and on a sheet of paper before him drew, by no means for the first time, a graph. At the foot of its rising slope he wrote the figure 15, at the termination of its descending line the figure 55. Forty years of his life ran between the two points and at the peak between them he wrote the word "Jack." Then up the rising line he printed the word "Responsive," down the falling "Irresponsive"; and gazed upon it.



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It meant, simply, as such a graph may mean for any man whose life has passed its climacteric, that up to a point of his life he has been responsive to life, beyond that point gradually irresponsible. Up to that point had been a zest of life both mental and physical; beyond it, as imperceptibly beginning as imperceptibly increasing, an indifference, an insensibility, a dulling of reactions to touchstones, intellectual or sensory, to which formerly had responded a keen delight.

This is a decline of forces which comes to all; it is of nature, "natural," and normally it carries with itself its own antidote to repining of it; powers, appetites, have gone but gone too is the inclination to exercise them: their loss is not regretted because their use is not desired. But Exceat when now he looked upon the graph of his own case meditated its irresponsible slope neither with the tolerant acceptance of one inoculated by disinclination nor yet with the repining of one who realizes his loss and as ardently as vainly wishes its recovery.

He meditated it, odd to believe, with lively eye.

He was, on his graph, at the bottom of a decline; but his regard of his plight was as that of one who, having tumbled down a quarry, cheerfully picks himself up and with a laugh surveys the line of his topple. He had watched himself falling. These several years now he had observed in himself his loss of reaction to the touchstones. But — here was the cause of his eye's sparkle — he had had a rope



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in his hands as he fell. And the length of the rope was the date of his hundredth book. And he had reached its extent (paid out though it had to one hundred and eleven). And now, brought up all standing by it, he was going to pull himself up again!

Exceat, in fact, when he first began to realize that at some point of his life since peak "Jack" he had begun to lose joy of life, had shaped up to the fact as often when on the upward, the responsive, slope he had shaped up to disinclination for a task in hand. "Let me get through this blighted book," he used to say, "and *then*, my word, I'll give myself a holiday"; and he would lock his door against all temptations, stifle every desire for indulgement, let the glad world go by and be dashed to it, and with his every energy drive his pen towards the gay release in which its toil should terminate. And as thus formerly with one book for temporary respite so latterly with the hundred books for permanent respite. When that hundredth was done, when, retired, he could touch the stones again as he proposed to touch them — deliberately, that was to say, not negligently; re-examining their virtues, not perfunctorily assuming them — they would give him back, he was convinced, their pleasures as of yore.

Exceat, counting thus, might have been admonished that he was making the wish father to the thought; that it was one thing to say that he expected with his retirement to find new values in old worths, quite another actually to

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discover them. But with the same liveliness with which he looked now upon the irresponsible slope of his graph he would have marked the warning. He knew better. He *knew*. Because he was not going to test the touchstones on, so to speak, their surfaces; he was going to tunnel up to them from under. It was to no advanced point on the slope Responsive that he proposed, with his retirement, to get himself back; it was to the boy in him that he intended to go back.

Not very remote for some men is the situation of that rare Tom Tiddler's ground named Boyhood. They retain an affinity with it such as no woman ever retained with her girlhood, and this is because in the nature in which every man has been a boy no woman ever has been a girl. Mother in embryo with her dolls, Eve in the egg in all her taste and instincts, from her cradle the girl-child already is part woman. The boy-child, barbarous in his every predilection by comparison with the adult stage into which he will pass, is utterly non-man. He regards adult man as, in the mass, his spoil-sport enemy; and by adult man he is, in the mass, regarded, in his crass appetite, in his disregard of personal appearance, comfort, and hygiene, in his noisiness, in his foolhardiness and in his destructiveness, as an outrage sent to plague a peaceful life. And shut off thus in a singular aloneness in the human-kind to which he belongs, the boy-kind is an animal unique in creation, so hedged about with restraints and yet so

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chartered in irresponsibility of the gods as to make his every movement a glorious defiance of the law; so virginal of sensation as to be ravished by climbing up a tree or down a pit: a freak of nature — whose attributes having lost, a man (despite his querulous disapproval of boy in the mass) will look back upon with the fondness of an exile yearning towards his home.

Exceat often had heard Jack, and for that matter other women, tell him that "Really, you're just a boy." He took it, with a laugh, as amiable reproof of exhibitions of boyish fun or tastes; but of recent years, as he came gradually down the slope Irresponsive, he found in himself increasingly a direct pull back to the interests of his boyhood. As nearer and nearer his last book approached, as more and more he felt within himself distaste for the developments in modern life about him, so more and more he developed a compelling hankering to be back among the simplicities with which he had begun.

He was held up one afternoon in the Strand by theatres discharging their *matinée* audiences and found himself wedged before the window of a stamp-collecting dealer. And looking at the sheets of rare stamps, at the albums for their collection, at the accessories for the hobby, his boyhood's absorption in the interest surged back upon him so that he remained before the window half an hour; and left it keenly planning that when he retired, he'd . . .

He was coming down High Holborn one day and was

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caught by a window displaying the make of pedal-bicycle — the Wizard — which had been his in the days when, punting about on it, he had collected material for his first book. Through half-a-dozen other makes he had graduated up to the pride of a Wizard from the incredible-to-memory solid-tyred atrocity which had begun his bicycling delights. Ravished, he saw the Wizard now in the glittering and ingenious splendour of thirty years' improvement on the model he had possessed. And the delights he had had of its kind surged back within him, and "The very day," he declared to himself, "after I reach that dashed hundredth book . . ."

He was having one of his impossible-to-eschew browses over the secondhand bookstalls while passing up Shaftesbury Avenue and an old volume of the *Boy's Own Paper* appeared before his eyes. With thrill he took it up and found it, as one coming upon buried treasure long-sought, to be a volume in which ecstatically he had revelled as boy. As rapturously the ecstasy returned to him now: there was not a picture as he turned the pages but vividly, as though he had seen it a first time but yesterday, he remembered in its every line. He bought the volume. Straight to the Bloomsbury upper-part in a taxi he took it. Transported back into the boy of twelve years old whom originally it had ravished, he went over it start to finish. He was working then on his believed to be ninety-ninth book. "Only one more to write," he said, closing the volume, "and I'll get

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the set of these as I used to know them and take them off with me, with a bike, with a stamp album. . . .”

“Sounds plumb daft to me,” said Philip Cray, his singular friend, when one evening hearing from him something of all this.

## Chapter III

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EXCEAT had a host of friends. Fleet Street and professional friends, friends of the stage, friends of the pictorial and the musical arts — friends indeed in all those groups of London life which commingle in the freemasonry of being, in this medium or in that, entertainers of the public, and membership of which, by virtue of that freemasonry, widens acquaintanceship as largely in the course of a single forgathering as will a year of meetings in coteries more sensible of the conventions. The most elaborate of forms of introduction in the circles in which Piers Exceat moved is, with a casual nod at the person indicated, "You know So-and-so, I expect." You don't possibly; but either you have heard of him or you know at all events that he paints, writes, acts, sings, plays, or would not be here; and the freemasonry of these vocations causes you to know him as a brother immediately and thenceforward. And Exceat knew, further, which not always is the case, most of his married friends' wives. Women liked him. He visited at most of his friends' homes. He was the kind of man a man invites to his home.

And yet for a long time now he had found himself in-

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creasingly unattracted by the good fellowship of all this wide company, irresponsible to it. He could not, he had been finding, go its pace. Its members had a no doubt wholesome satisfaction with themselves which no doubt had once been his but which now he lacked; they had a forthright hardihood of opinion, roundly damning this man, that social or artistic tendency, this political phase, which he envied but which, handicapped by, latterly, an invariable feeling that there was another side to the matter, he by no means could emulate; and they had, too, a no doubt healthy commercialism of outlook, sharpened quite often with a jealousy of one another, which no doubt he once had shared but of which now he found himself a little sick. At any gathering, groups would form animatedly debating, vigorously criticizing, robustiously enjoying; and Exceat, irresponsible to it all, would find excuse and go home to the task whose completion would get him out of it all; and when he desired company sought it more and more in that of Philip Cray and his wife Catherine whom, in a joke between them, he termed his "singular" friends, because, not being entertainers of the public, having spent their lives indeed in decidedly practical works abroad, they were of a world entirely different from his own.

Cray was some ten years older than Exceat. Hugely framed, bullock-shouldered, topped with a great head on which the face appeared to have been roughed out with an axe and left unchiselled, his profession of mining engineer had been pursued all his time in a small but highly

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independent South American republic, his services to which — alike in its war of liberation and two subsequent insurrections as in his development of its mineral wealth — had been such as to be given memorial there by his statue in the principal square of the capital and by his head on an issue of postage stamps. He carried his hands, enormously fisted, always in his jacket pockets with the suggestion, having regard to his record, of holding them in concealed readiness for vigorous use; and he gave Exceat, when, towering about him he stood talking with him, the feeling, Exceat would tell him, of talking from its foot to Beachy Head. He knew two books by heart; had them in thumbled-limp copies purchased when a student; travelled nowhere without them, and never was seen by Exceat to be reading any other. One was Burnand's *Happy Thoughts*, the other *Paradise Lost*.

Catherine, his wife, who was of his own age and had gone out to South America to marry him when both were twenty-three, was a cosy little body in rimless spectacles and a shawl, having the appearance of the wife of a country vicar but for the record of two men shot dead at one door of a room while her husband with an iron bar was increasing a revolutionary mortality-bill at the other, and of a burglar, in the London home of their retirement, who caused himself to telephone for the police in place of being punctured a third time with an air-gun. She was pleasantly well read and her Golden Treasury copy of Wordsworth, as limp with use as Cray's two volumes, was covered with



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cooking recipes on its title-leaves and with blood-stock pedigree notes on its end-pages.

Exceat had first met the pair while on his calamitous honeymoon in Majorca where they were spending part of their regular biennial trip home. They had befriended him in the tragic circumstances of Jack's death in a degree which took complete charge of him, body and mind, emergency arrangements and normal needs; and there was seeded thus in the relations between them and Exceat an attitude, tutelary on their part, gratefully tractable on his, which, in succeeding intercourse through the years, their rugged experience of life, his own innate boyishness of character, developed into an affectionate complement of regard such as may sometimes be found in after-life between schoolmaster and former pupil, patron and erst-while protégé.

The Crays indeed shared secretly to themselves the belief that there was something about Exceat which set him apart from the run of men and which one day, despite he was getting on in life, in some rather surprising fashion would come out of him.

"Had that Beachy Head joke of his on me again this evening," Cray once said to Catherine. "But he's no pigmy tripper standing at the foot, you know. The way he was talking, and looking, after dinner this evening made me, as Beachy Head, think of him as a sea-gull floating round."

Catherine was combing out her hair preparatory to

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bed. "That's very good," she nodded. "Yes, a sea-gull; to and fro, eh? Space and solid cliff, and to and fro in the stillness for a foothold?"

"Yes, questing."

"Questing, yes."

Something in the philosophy line was Cray's idea of the purpose of the questing, of the thing in Exceat which one day would come out of him, something in the spiritual way was Catherine's opinion; and on that night of his confidences in regard to his boyhood interests, of his intentions to exploit them anew when, very shortly now, he got away to his retirement in Quaile, they heard from him bits and scraps which each, when he had left them, claimed as evidence of the tendency each predicted of him.

Beachy Head-like on his hearthrug, "Sounds plumb daft to me," said Cray, hearing of the stamp-album intentions, of the bicycle and of the *Boy's Own Paper*. "Why not get a bucket and spade and go down to the seaside in paddling drawers and be done with it?"

Exceat had laughed appreciatively. "Well, I can imagine myself at that," he had declared. "I was suckled in a creed today alleged to be outworn, Beachy Head, and that's the long and short, I daresay, of all this irresponsiveness of mine that I've told you of and that you've seen for yourselves, both of you, growing over me; and with old Wordsworth I'd swap all that now surrounds me, so might I, with my bucket and spade, have glimpses — how does it go, Cath?"

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"So might I," quoted Catherine, "'standing on this pleasant lea —'"

"*Some* pleasant lea," amended Cray, "it may be Margate."

Catherine tossed a hand in dismissal of the facetiousness but accepted the suggestion, adapting also the pronoun:

"So might you, standing on some pleasant lea,  
Have glimpses that would make you less forlorn;  
Have sight of Proteus rising from the sea;  
Or hear old Triton blow his wreathèd horn."

"That's it," claimed Exceat. He nodded his head at his hosts, smiling cheerfully. "That's the idea."

Catherine gave him back the smile affectionate. "Well, I'll say this for you, Piers — I quite think you'll have the glimpses when you get away into this retreat of yours. I quite think that."

"So I," from the top of Beachy Head. "Yes, I can see you, when you get down to it, glimpsing."

Exceat rested his eyes a reflective moment on Catherine's, then on Cray's. "I wonder." He wrinkled his brows at his shoes, stretched out from his armchair before him and was silent. Then with a laugh he looked up. "I'll tell you this much," he said; "I'm going to do a bit of thinking when I get away, not all playing. I'm going to take down with me, as well as the stamp album and the bike, as well as the bucket and spade for my fun —" He stopped. His eyes made mischief at them. "— Frames for the glimpses."

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Catherine accepted the mocking invitation. "Frames?"

"Well, blank canvases, shall I say?" As though suddenly determining, he pulled himself to his feet. "Here, let me have the hearth-rug, Phil. I can display them better standing up. Frames" — he faced them — "for the glimpses I want to try for, blanks for the pictures I want to fix. Here's one. When we sum up a man we talk, don't we, about his 'life.' Matter of fact a man, as he gets on in years, has lived through half-a-dozen lives."

"Seven, isn't it," corrected Cray, "according to Shakespeare."

"Yes, he made seven of 'em and called them Ages. Well, I'm putting it to myself, in my frame, that a man when he looks back has been a boy and he's been a youth and he's been a lover and he's been a fizzing keen worker and all the rest of the phases, and I'm calling them, not lives or ages, but Selves. He's lived through half-a-dozen quite different selves, all younger, naturally, and fresher and nearer to the best of him than the self he's dragging along in now. Agreed? Right. Where are they now?"

Cray, parodying, tuned, "Where are my happy selves? Far, far away."

Catherine, quoting, said "Dead — 'our dead selves.'"

Exceat gesturing with his hands as one displaying an exhibit, said, "In this 'ere frame of mine, ladies and gents, not dead but buried — buried alive."

He dropped his hands. "Unriddle," demanded Cray.

"This way," Exceat smiled. "I've the idea — watch me

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being serious — that those past selves of a man are still alive inside him, stored up somewhere in his subconsciousness. Look now; take those dreams I've told you I sometimes have of Jack. Jack's been dead twenty, thirty years; in my day-to-day life I never think of her; if I happen to, if as now I speak of her, I do so without a sigh, without an emotion. But in those dreams — how do you account for this? — in those dreams I'm so passionately alive to her, she to me, that I will awake, as I've told you, hearing myself crying her name, and will lie there, in those first moments of waking, quickened in every impulse for her. How d'you account for it? I'll tell you how I do, in this frame of mine. Can't it mean that the self of me of those Jack days, the chap I was then, if you get me, still is inside me somewhere?"

He began to fill his pipe. "See the idea, the theory? That self of those days is in storage in me, immured, bricked in. The mind which acts for me in my dreams can get at it, set it free, live in it. Now then —" He replaced his pouch in his pocket and stabbed then his pipe toward his listeners — "if my dream mind can get at it why shouldn't my conscious mind? If in my dream state I can reoccupy that self which once was me, why not in my conscious, in my lively" — He poked his pipe at his chest — "in my *this* state?"

Cray said flatly, "How?"

Exceat laughed. "That's what's to be found out. But, Phil, but Cath, it's a pretty attractive, in the foul word they use nowadays it's a pretty intriguing idea, isn't it? Imagine if one found that one could get back into the, the qualities

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one used to have, the vigours, the virtues, the vitalities, when one was younger?"

Catherine sighed. "Oh, if one could!"

Exceat lit his pipe and laughed again. "That's what we all say. 'If only I could be as once I was.' Well, p'raps I'll show you. You ask How, Bill, in that flat-footed, uncompromising way of yours. Well, look here, man; you laugh at my stamp-album and my bike but even when I'm thinking of the fun I'm going to have with those I feel half boy again. When I get down into them, using them, who says I won't find myself all boy — what'll you bet? That's somewhere about the line of it anyway; because, don't you see, if I can get back into my boyhood self by thinking the thoughts of my boyhood, why not into my later responsive self, into the self that loved work and loved love and loved life and all the rest of it, by thinking the thoughts I had then?"

Deliberately reproducing his former tone, "How?" inquired Cray.

"Oh, don't," breathed Catherine, "fire blunderbusses at the sea-gull!"

"How sea-gull?" demanded Exceat. "What's the connection? What's the joke?"

"Keep flying," said Cray, "keep telling us."

"Private allusions," Exceat reproved, "are damn bad form. Keep giving myself away I expect you mean. Well, I will and be dashed to how you mock, because I'm on to something, I do believe, and, in the irresponsive state I've

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got into these years, that alone — feeling excited about a thing — is a getting-back to what I used to be. I'll give myself away pretty badly now because my next frame, you'll say, touches religious stuff and religious stuff isn't done nowadays in nice company."

He drew big draughts from his pipe, Catherine and Cray watching him, then resumed.

"Frame Two for my glimpses, though I'd no idea that it did when I first built it, fits up, I believe, with the other frame, helps answer your How?, Phil, and that's why I'm showing it to you. Listen here, boys and girls."

With smile he drew a little memorandum-book from a breast pocket and wagged it at them. "Listen here. The world's bung full of hate today, fuller, I daresay, than it's ever been, and likelier than ever to blow up on account of it. Well, I had the notion sometime ago that when I got away into my retirement I'd start thinking out quietly what's the cause of it all and how the dickens it might be ridded, and then the other day" — He turned the leaves of his notebook — "I came across this and knew, all of a heap, point-blank, chapter and verse and all the rest of it, what the cause is. Listen." And he read:

"The hurtful word, the hate-full thought,  
Cast from me, Lord, as Christ once wrought  
The self-same miracle when He  
Freed men possessed in Galilee."

He looked at them, expression mischievous again. "Do you get it?"

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"I *like* it," said Catherine slowly; "I think it's very beautiful; I'd like to copy it, please. But as to its showing the cause of all the world hate —"

"And beyond me too," said Cray, voicing the obvious implication of her break.

"It showed me, point-blank," said Exceat, "that the cause" — he put his hand on his heart and bowed theatrically — "is in me."

They made sounds of amusement. "Again — unriddle," demanded Cray.

Exceat's face showed dropping of his trifling. "The hate's in the unit, Phil," he said; "that's what that verse revealed to me. Get it out of the unit, out of *one* unit, out of *me*, and you're one definite step, by God, towards getting it out of all mankind."

He watched them ponder this.

"But, Piers," Catherine objected, "I agree; I think that's very soundly said; but you — you're not a hater; you don't hate."

"Not a hate, you don't," Cray agreed. "I'm a hater. I hate dictators, I abominate poetry, I loathe the modern novel, I savagely hate pretty well all the modern ideas: and whenever I argue with you about anything of the kind I hate you too. You only deprecate; you're only a miserable tolerant who thinks, invariably, that there's something in the other view. That's not honest-to-God hating."



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Exceat pointed a quick finger at him. "Ha, you've said it. It's not honest-to-God hating that I mean; it's, it's honest-to-hell hating. The hate I mean, in the unit, isn't the healthy bald-headed hate of pepper-pots like you, old man, who blow up and as quickly cool down and forget it. The hate I mean — Cath, you'll understand — is the petty-hate that's always on the simmer; the stifled, rankling hate, nursing petty injuries, hugging petty grievances, microscoping for the offensive qualities in your neighbour and blind-eyeing at the good, that half the units of the world get up with every morning and keep over a pin gas-jet all day long."

"This is getting," said Catherine drolly, "very uncomfortable."

They all laughed.

"Oh, you two," Exceat disclaimed for them, "you're altogether too big for it; when people annoy you you use shot-guns and then bind up their wounds with oil and wine. It's the little makeshifts like me —"

"Now, Piers, of all the rubbish —"

"No, no, Cath; every man knoweth his own heart, or should, and quite certainly I know mine. This verse, I tell you, gets it pat. 'The hurtful word'; good lord, how often in my life I've slipped it into someone. 'The hate-full thought.' It's written in the verse here, not with 'hateful' as one word in its sense of odious, but with a hyphen, 'hate-full' in its sense 'full of hate'; and, heavens, the times

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I let my mind, hugging a resentment, sit round with thoughts about a person that are, when you take 'em to pieces and realize them, bung full of hate. It becomes a habit, 'pon my soul it does; and your mind, while you're indulging the hate-full thoughts, a munitions-factory producing the hurtful words. Dreadful!

"Well, there you are," he broke off with a laugh. "That's Frame Two for the bit of thinking I'm going to do down in Quaille. Frame One — study in getting one's self of present life back into one's selves of past life. Frame Two — study in ridding the world of hate by ridding the unit of hate. And here's where, surprisingly to me, when it suddenly occurred to me, I believe they fit into one another; here's the answer, Phil, to your 'How think the thoughts that will get one back into the selves that used to have them?' Why, by clearing out the thoughts that, since their time, have overlaid them."

He replaced his notebook in his pocket. "I believe," he said, ticking off the point on the index finger of his left hand, "that one's past selves are bricked-in inside one, capable of release. I've the idea" — he ticked off the second finger — "that, by taking thought, they can be got at, got back into. I'm inclined to think" — he ticked off the third — "that the biggest chunks of the bricking-in are laid by bricklayers who, as men were freed in Galilee, can be given notice to quit."

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With gesture of airy dismissal he opened all the fingers of the hand. "Let's leave it. Don't, please, smash up my beautiful frames with questions. Let me take 'em all shiny and unscratched down with me to Quail."

## Chapter IV

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AND now riding — from Harry Hay's towards Island House — on a bicycle up a country road! He could have laughed aloud for the pure, for the boyish, joy of the thing. He put on speed and then free-wheeled; he rang the bell; he slowed down almost to stopping-point and delighted himself with the masterly twistings of his front-wheel by which he preserved his balance.

His youth, much more his boyhood, by association surged back about him, suffusing him as invigorating breeze taken from the opened window of a stuffy room, as wine drunken by one fatigued. He was boy again blithely homeward from day-school, he was boy-larking off on an errand. He was youth spinning off to see friends, he was youth on a holiday tour.

These, comprehended in a general, in a gaily thoughtless, lightheartedness, were his immediate reactions. They materialized very soon, as figures taking form in a mist, into actual recollections presented not only vividly before his mind's eye but with the self-same buoyant feelings that had accompanied them when they were established. He saw, and felt, himself punting about this very countryside in the making of that first book; he saw, and felt, himself similarly

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joyously ambling in scenes where others of his earliest had been done. But they were come and gone, all these, in a hundred yards of road. They were caught up, and he was caught up, newly joyed, newly invigorated, by feelings of his boyhood. He saw, and in head and heart and limbs experienced, himself as boy on his bike off to bathe with Harry Winter, his chum. He saw the very clothes he then was wearing, the veritable white flannel jacket of Harry's which greatly he had envied! He heard the shouts of their laughter as they did bumping-competition all up the road. He saw the dropped bathing towel and he and Harry circling round and round it to pick it up from the saddle without dismounting. He saw himself out to a picnic with his brother and sister, sister on her own bike, young brother pillioned behind him by standing on the mounting-step which cycles in those days had. He felt his brother's hands on his shoulders, he heard himself at the foot of Loudon Hill, growling, as, dismounted, he wiped the sweat from his face, "Now you can darned well do the shoving up." . . .

They were in no sense, these visionings, the common cast-back of the thoughts which frequently will amuse, or sadden, any of us. They were as presently, emerging from them and debating them, he determined, an investment of himself at fifty-four with the joys, the perceptions, the vitalities of the self that had been his at twelve, fourteen; a re-creation of that self; a birth anew of guileless, care-free boy in irresponsible, travailed, ageing man. Which was exactly what, in his frame, he had laid before the Crays!

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Could such a thing indeed be? Yes, here, he told himself, here in this release and recapture of his boyhood-self a few moments gone was vivid proof it could; and, keyed beneath the illumination of actual example, his mind filled in that which he had but lightly sketched before his friends. Daily almost since first he had evolved his theory he had conned its formula. He examined it now with the new interest of an experimentalist whose first test of his device has been successfully made. Yes, just as the acquired balancings of the body, as in bicycling, in riding, in skating, in swimming, are never lost; just as, once mastered, they are stored in the subconsciousness ready, at howsoever long interval thereafter, to animate the limbs and trunk again; so surely the physiological developments through which we pass — as boyhood, as youth, as maturity; as love, as zeal, as zest — are never dead, are stored in the subconsciousness ready again to garrison and lead the soul.

He laughed. "If I can get at them and let them free," he said, half audibly; and from that his thoughts ran on: "And if that's been done today, as it has been, merely by looking over Marketplace from my window, and then by sauntering round its shops, and now, really astonishingly, by riding this old grid of Mr. Invisible Ashby, how much more when with a super-bike of my very own I come permanently to live —"

And at the point of his progression towards Island House now reached, he broke off there to —

"There's the wall, I do believe, of my Island. But it

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can't be! That old grey stone, six foot every inch of it, that's the wall of a duke's castle. But it curves away, by Jove, through this scrub here to what looks like another road up top. So the far end, straight ahead, quite likely is at the road-fork which makes the place a kind of island." Excitedly he pressed his pedals. Abreast now of the ducal, the age-old, the six-foot, wall, "No, it can't be," he cried to himself; "a wall like this could never possibly be mine. . . . It is! There's the milestone; *my* milestone. Holy wonders, this beats all."

For the milestone ("Quaile 2 Miles") when he reached it sure enough was, as Mr. Harry Hay had said, "bang" opposite a gateway in the noble wall. And what a gateway! Exceat swung from his bicycle and gazed, ecstatic, unbelieving. Double doors of undressed oak, gone grey to hue almost of the wall, stood between pillars surmounted each by the time-moulted remains of what was once perhaps impressive griffin. The thing was perfect; and with perfection's last delicious touch the handle and the outline of a wicket showed upon the right-hand door.

The wicket, romance's own especial portal, settled it for Exceat. *His* milestone, *his* wall, *his* entry, *his* wicket. Let be within this gorgeous circumvallation whatsoever might be, from a mud hut to a mansion as to the residence, from a desert to a jungle as to the grounds, Island House from that moment henceforward and for evermore was his.

And he must enter it, of course, through the wicket. Harry Winter and he would never have opened a gate

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when they could scramble, bikes and all, through a door within a door. Completely boy, "I'll stuff the bike through that" thought he, measuring its narrow dimensions with his eye, "somehow"; and gaily set about to do it.

It took some doing. The top scraped off his hat; the bottom, while he was easing the back wheel over it, leagued with the pedals in barking his shins; the sides, while he persuaded the handle-bar between them, grazed his knuckles. But he got her through, went back for his hat, closed his wicket — and stood upon his island.

"I've landed!"

The way before him — of natural featuring aided by neglect more woodland tract than carriage drive — curved away, ascending gently, to his right; a watercourse — "my stream" thought he and gaily nodded to it — adjacent. When he reached the bend, the line of the stream at this point bearing away left-handed, he discerned that the whole property lay on a slope mounting upwards towards the far circuit of the enclosing wall. Easy enough to the unhampered, it was an incline which, in absorbing days to come, by mighty staggers up it with barrow-loads of stuffs for his digging, his path-making and his draining, he was to appreciate to grimmest full.

Fifty yards onward from the bend the enflanking trees came to end, he saw; and the track, becoming there a gravelled way, went right and left to encircle a lawn. The house, he guessed, stood there; and he came presently to



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the divergence, and on his left, facing towards the road on which he had ridden out of Quaile, he saw the house and knew it, in that single eyeshot, for the veritable house which, as he came up the drive, he had known, somehow, that it would be.

As Marketplace when he had first seen it had appeared before him straight out of a Randolph Caldecott, so Island House as now first he looked upon it stood before him straight out of a Kate Greenaway. Queen Anne to its most insignificant detail, because it was perfect to type it presented, in fact, no detail that was either significant or insignificant: it was a unity, a perfect coherence of perfect parts. It was of red brick, if either red or brick that gracious softness of its composition could be called; roofed with stone tiles, if stone or tiling could be comprehended in the mellowed covering, as it might be a lichen-apron, that stretched between the dormers and the graceful chimney-stacks. On either side of the entrance three windows stood in the ground floor, each with its replica on the first-floor above, their cross-frames, straight from their period, thick as the half of a woman's wrist. The door of yellowed oak was gracefully pillared on each side, fan-light fit for a museum-piece above, surmounted by a fine double window, as broad as high. Three half-circles of stone made the steps before the door, a time-worn mounting-block beside them.

And the whole stood smiling towards the wide grass-plot which centred the gravel sweep and onward to lawns,

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neglected yet of lovely promise, which stretched beyond.

Out in the road before the gateway Exceat had registered Island House as for ever his. Here, paused before the house itself, he handed it his heart to have in perpetual keeping. And he wheeled up then the bicycle, leaned it against the front, and pulled the bell. A pull, as he approvingly noted, not a push; instrument of a muffin-man's delectable tinkle, as appreciatively he heard, not of a jarring electric whirr. The very summons to inhabitants of this enchantment was in keeping with its grace; and in highest amiability he awaited the inhabitant who now should answer it.

"Something to do with a table-cloth," he smiled to himself, "Miss Baize"; and the door was opened to him then by a short, thin, dark-skinned body, aggressively trim in black, face cobweb of pin-point lines, eyes boot-buttons of brilliant polish, who apparently had just suffered the misfortune of a highly distasteful swallowing which behind hermetically pursed lips she was determined at all costs to keep down.

Exceat raised his hat. Uncomfortably feeling that sympathy rather than business was demanded, and awkwardly endeavouring to express it by his salute, "I've come," he said, "from Mr. Harry Hay to have a look around this house. You're expecting me, I believe! Exceat, my name is"; and the excitement of his enterprise overcoming then his concern for the victim of repugnant flavour, "And I don't mind telling you," he smiled, "that the place seems to

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me to be just what I've been looking for half my life."

Miss Baize swallowed. "Well, there's all tastes," she replied.

In her swallowing she had pursed her lips yet more firmly than before. She returned them now, her opinion given, to the same degree of fixity; and the true cause of her pursing — habitual as Exceat soon came to know — stood clear. It was repression, not of something swallowed, but of her feelings on life in general and on whatsoever manifestation of it might be specifically brought to her notice in particular. "Well, there's all tastes," was Miss Baize's safety valve for these feelings thus battened down; and she stood aside now to admit Exceat with strong implication of the high imagination needed to include a predisposition towards Island House in the wide range of human aberrations thus generously admitted.

Exceat, however, concerned in no degree with any ideas but his own, found these, as he went about the house under her guidance, so delectably met by all he saw that had Miss Baize's pursing been discovered to conceal the presence of damp, dry-rot or doubtful drains still would he have decided as at every step he reaffirmed to himself that of all the world's houses this and no other was the house for him.

Of the six windows which, from outside, he had noted on the ground level, two, he found, one on either side of the front-door, lighted the circular chamber, pine-panelled, which was the entrance-hall; and he had always considered a round hall to have charm and character such as no other

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shape could give. To left the two remaining windows on that side stood in a room which went through the short breadth of the house to two similar windows (though of a later period, he thought) on the other side, passing a further window in the external walls; and he had always had it that the ideal room was a room that looked two ways. Here three!

This, the moment Miss Baize opened the door upon it, was the room that should be, he determined, his living-room. And what a living he would live in such a setting! There in that recess, should be his bookshelves; against the back windows his work-table, against the front another so that a chap could sit to this view or to that as the mood took him. Deeper than Prospero's staff the slick pen was to be buried when he came down here, deeper than did ever plummet sound were to be drowned the hundred books of its contriving when, a few months hence, the hundredth (as he then numbered it) should be topped upon the mass. Always he had had fond musings upon the engagement, in his retirement, of a pen serene, unfeed, which should devise a book, not for profit, not perhaps indeed for publication, but for his private mind; a writing composed not of the traffic before the outward view, shared with the bazaar and done for the bazaar, but of the stillness behind the inward eye, private to thought, done for himself alone. And standing now within this perfect workroom, furnishing it as his gaze moved about it, he felt himself at that

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good table over there; a winter's five o'clock. All afternoon he would have been digging, path-making; or out perhaps miles and miles on the super-bike he then would have. A gorgeous tea would have followed, taken while stretched out in great saddle-bag armchair before the blaze; and then — Recalled by life down here from where it lay immured, as had been, by the bicycle spin just now, boyhood thrills from boyhood's tomb, the old familiar urge to be at desk again would course about his veins; and seated there responsive to it, serenity his pen, his ink the garnered harvest of his mind. . . .

"Mr. Harry Hay," broke in Miss Baize, "named this the lounge."

"He would," said Exceat, back to enchanted earth from magic casements. "I loathe the word," he laughed. "This, when I come here, everyone is going to call my workroom, and my bedroom my sleep-room. There's not the abomination which Mr. Harry Hay would call 'H. and C. fixed basin' in any bedroom I'm likely to choose, is there?"

"There certainly is not," unpursed Miss Baize.

"Good on it. Basins and all that belong to what I shall call my wash-room; the bathroom, see? Which leaves the dining-room and that we'll call my feeding-room. That's how I like rooms to be named, in honest English what they are. What do you think?"

What Miss Baize thought appeared to be of a nature so unutterable that she sealed it by visibly further pursing of

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her pursed lips, and the inspection tour proceeded. After that workroom-of-dreams no other apartment, however, was of great account to Exceat, either in suitability or in shortcoming. He was agog now to be exploring through the grounds, and the only remaining matter of comment was occasioned when Miss Baize, opening a door which closed one end of the upper landing, unpursed her lips to remark "The domestic quarters, Mr. Harry Hay said, and where I'm now occupying" — she indicated one room of two — "as you see." The doors of both apartments stood open. In that first pointed out to Exceat were a bed and makeshift furniture; in the other a palliasse upon the floor, rugs and a close smell.

"Someone keeping you company?"

"My passed-on sister's son, my nephew Charles," said Miss Baize and pursed her lips with a rigidity so suggestive of lockjaw that Exceat, sensing the relationship to be something wanting in fondness, thought better of offering the genial "Nice to have someone with you" which he had had in mind.

"I'll prowl about outside now," he substituted. "By what I've seen from the windows up here the grounds are just a wilderness." He laughed. "And if I find they're not," he added, "I'm going to be disappointed. My ideal garden's a place run wild and left for me to tame."

"Well, there's all tastes," said Miss Baize and, pursing, led him down.

## Chapter V

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LEAVING Miss Baize by a back-door, the more conveniently to reach the outbuildings, which he thought he would inspect first, Exceat gave eye as he walked away to the rear elevation of the house. He had taste and in the matter of architecture his taste, necessitated for his guide-book work, was trained. In the workroom-of-dreams he had noticed at once that the rear windows were of later design than the front and he saw now that all the back of the house, and pleasantly enough, was in similar case. The residence had at one time, he felt, been of greater size. Surrounding a flagged yard, there ran back from each extremity of the house a wall which, no more than waist-high, stood there obviously for effect, which it delightfully achieved, rather than for protective enclosure. Having a mellower look than that of this aspect of the house, it had formed, he felt sure, the original back elevation of the dwelling. There had been a fire possibly, or, for some other reason, a deliberate reconstruction within narrower limits of the rear.

“Page of its history,” was his thought. “Just what a house should do — talk to you when you look at it”; and pleased anew to the outbuildings he made his way.

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Here, best of all, was a weed-grown stable-yard, complete with coach-house, harness-room, three boxes and two stalls. The boxes opened on to the yard with doors divided across in the approved fashion at two thirds of their height so that a horse could look out or its owner look in. Never in position to be an owner Exceat, who had done some riding, loved horses with the affection frequently wanting in those who, keeping a stable, regard its inmates almost solely from point of view of sport or of utility.

Looking at the box doors, "I'll imagine," was his immediate thought, "a horse's head sticking out of each of those, ears pricked as it hears me come along"; and, with the thought, again this day the crypt wherein his boyhood, yet living, lay immured, was reached and opened up. As boy he had had the run, at his parents' home, of tenantless stabling such as this, though not by half so spacious. As boy daily had fed sugar at the box doors to horses not seen of other eyes. As boy had invested surroundings such as these with imaginings which now again, looking bright-eyed about him, he re-created. An outdoor working-camp he'd have here; a settler's homestead; a pampas hacienda; a rancher's stockyard; a bushman's shack; his horses looking on. His thought was, "I'll jolly well have a camp bed out here and sometimes sleep here."

He lit a pipe, chucked the match gaily from him, and, head back, trod forth to thrill of exploration of the wild.

Wilderness left for him to tame was his ideal in gardens,



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he had told Miss Baize. Wilderness to the exact proportions of ideal's design he found wheresoever his feet now took him. Nature had been given her freedom seemingly for years in the grounds of Island House and she had carried it, when now Exceat trod them, to that point at which traces of man's dominion over her had been almost, but not quite, obliterated.

To Exceat this stage in the growth of a wilderness was of all phases the most fascinating possible. He was in a thicket and, lo, here were signs of what once had been an harbour. He was in scrub less dense than that on either hand and positively it was a gravelled path's remains he trod. Here had been flower-beds; there a box-lined grassy walk. An unexpected outcrop of stones and boulders set him stumbling and he recognized it for a rock-garden; tiled foundation seemed to be beneath the rankness underneath his feet and proved to be, and he had found, some sort of crazy-paving lay-out.

It was in that portion of the grounds which lay before the house that these discoveries were made. Here also were the remains of an extensive kitchen-garden, a south wall rich in fruit-trees crying monstrosously for pruning-shears, and lawns and paddock. Behind was woodland, nature's own; and it was as he trod upwards through the trees, past miniature dells, low grassy hillocks, trickling water-courses, that Exceat felt within him the thrill which in later days he was to exploit to the full. Here was as it might be the virgin backwoods of a settler's West. "The stableyard the

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homestead!" was his thought; and ran his eye where paths which he would make should go, and over boggy patches which he'd drain, and marked down likely trees for felling, and visualized the noble woodstack which should follow. He found a pond, spacious enough to call a lake, and saw himself rafting on the raft which, with tubs for lockers, he would make. Raft — he'd have a punt as well, by Jove. That very number of the *Boy's Own Paper* in which he had revelled had contained instructions for the making of a punt. Imagine the fun! He pushed his way right up to the far circumference of the ducal wall and found there, at the point he struck, a grassy terracing, the views magnificent, where, thought he, a summer shelter should be built.

The tools he'd want! Imagine buying 'em at that fascinating ironmonger's in Marketplace! Beginning now to make return towards the house, spade and axe he saw himself choosing, pick and shovel, hedgehook, mattock, grubber, saw. One of those long double-handed saws as well, he must have, for bringing down those trees and then for cutting up the trunks when felled. Which brought up that double-handed saw required double-handed labour, and that, though doing all this reclamation of the wilderness was going to be his personal delight, labour of some sort he clearly must have to help him.

"Just a chap of some sort to help the push and pull and heave and dig work," his thoughts ran. "Not one of your

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skilled gardeners or professional field-workers, though, to throw fits at my ideas and try to boss me; not that on any account. Just another pair of arms and legs to sweat and grunt beside me, taking my orders as I tell him. An unskilled, off-the-dole, Man-Friday sort of cove who — ”

And carrying his gaze, in these cogitations, to a new quarter of the open patch of scrub in which he had stood musing them, Exceat perceived himself to have been regarded all this while by a pair of eyes belonging to a personality which proclaimed “unskilled” in its every line and feature.

This was a lanky youth, sitting back half-concealed in the undergrowth and, nicely propped as he was by bushes, legs comfortably outstretched, amusedly smiling, clearly very much at his ease. Betokening by Exceat’s slight start that he had at last been observed, “Don’t a chap look not half a funny piece, though,” he genially remarked, “when he stands staring all ways never knowing he’s almost got his foot on a chap what’s watching him?”

Exceat laughed. “Thanks; I suppose he does rather. Is that what you do all day, sit there watching funny pieces?”

“Most days I do, if it’s fine,” brightly returned the youth; “wet days I sits in under out of the rain somewhere and watches that.”

He spoke with a lively air as though this were the midst of engaging conversation with an old friend, in no way opening exchanges with a stranger; and he adjusted as he did

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so, the better to examine his questioner, steel-rimmed spectacles indifferently repaired at the bridge with sealing-wax, and, on the left side, secured to one of his almost right-angled ears by a loop of string in place of shaft.

Exceat enjoyed the drollness alike of his aspect and his manner. "Not that you'd seen many pieces here, funny or otherwise, I'd imagine. This place is supposed to be private, isn't it?"

"That's right." The youth coiled in his long legs, arose upon them without use of his hands in an uncannily double-jointed sort of fashion, and, still holding his glasses by one eyepiece as will a short-sighted picture appraiser his pince-nez, stepped forth. "But b'longs as you might say to me Antie while she's caretaking at the house there; and I'm her Charles, see?"

Exceat saw; the passed-on sister's son this must be, who dossed upon the palliasse in the room with the stuffy smell next to Miss Baize's, and at her mention of whom Miss Baize had so uncompromisingly pursed her lips.

His own lips demanded repression of a smile as now in full view nephew Charles confronted him.

Overgrown yet underdeveloped; all wrong somehow in wrists and hands, in knees and feet; all wrong too, without being precisely cross-eyed, in the orbits behind his absurd spectacles, nephew Charles suggested nothing so much as a College of Surgeons Museum specimen of adolescent rickets which, escaping from its stand, had garbed itself with one article apiece from as many scarecrows as he re-

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quired coverings. His jacket, of an unearthly purple shade, was grotesquely small; his trousers, of an unnatural green, though short, grotesquely large. A boot trodden inwards was on one foot, a shoe trodden outwards on the other. A celluloid collar, attached neither before nor behind to shirt, moved freely and tie-free about his stringy neck. A clergyman's hat, toned both to the purple and the green of his garments, completed him.

And he possessed with it all, and none the less attractively for all, a noticeably fine skin; a fresh, pleasant voice, void of accent or common taint if not circumspect of diction; and a drolly taking manner joined with despite his short-sighted peering, a taking expression of face, such as might have graced, Exceat thought, any of a total of well-dressed youth met in a day's routine.

And Exceat, who always was instinctive and instantaneous in his reaction to contacts, and seldom wrong, took an immediate, if necessarily a whimsical, liking to him.

"Ah, you're Miss Baize's Charles?" he smiled. "She mentioned you. She's been showing me round the house."

Hand to glasses, the youth stepped closer. "Are you going to take it?"

"I believe I am."

Again as if Exceat were a picture and he inspecting it, Miss Baize's Charles stepped closer yet. "If you want a Juvenile," he confided, "to work for you, you just go to the Labour Exchange, Juvenile Employment Branch, Town Hall Annexe, Milk Street, and they'll tell you all about

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me, show you me Card, school attendance, references and all."

"They will, will they? Why not tell me yourself, though? Do you want a job?"

"That's right," affirmed the Juvenile brightly. "You haven't got a piece of sticking-pilaster, have you, to fix these glasses in the middle here while I tell you what I can do?"

Exceat scarcely ever, he said, carried sticking-"pilaster" about with him. What sort of jobs could Charles do?

"Most any jobs," declared Charles keenly. "Mind you, I've tried most and generally can't according to those as has tried me; and me Antie she's of mind that I can't do nothing at all. But, there, I've bin in an' out of Hospitals, Blind-schools, Seaside-convalescents and all like that, half me time, see? Here, how many" — he advanced long double-jointed fingers to the top button of Exceat's waist-coat, the better to engage him in these confidences — "Here, how many operations do you think I've had on me eyes? Counting from when I was too young to know, but what me Antie's told me, I've had eleven. Eleven. Ah, and they wasn't half a joke, some of them. There was one doctor feller —"

Beginning to feel rather as felt the Wedding Guest, Exceat detached the Ancient Mariner-like fingers. "I'll hear about them another time," he said. "I'd like to. I've got to get back to your aunt as it is. Just tell me about these jobs

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you've tried — gardening, house-jobs, that kind of thing, eh?"

"That's right. They say I'm not strong enough for their lawn-mowers and their heavy coals, and all that like, but you shouldn't half see me in some of our Scout rallies when me Antie let's me go to 'em. Lark we had last summer, you'd die to hear it. Our Scoutmaster, he bought down a —"

Inclined to be inordinately scrupulous of the feelings of other people, howsoever humble, and suffering considerably in consequence, Exceat apprehended here, for once, a type which nothing of brusqueness could offend and with which only brusqueness could deal. "Well cheer-o, Charles," he therefore broke in and made summary retreat. "If I take the house I'll take you too, I wouldn't be surprised. We'll see what your aunt's got to say."

"Cheer-o," said Charles affably, proceeding at once to recoil himself into the arbour from which he had first emerged; "and, hey!" he called, leaning forward hand to glasses, "if you could pop a bit of sticking-pilaster into your pocket next time you're coming along —"

"I'll try to remember it," cried Exceat and betook himself, much tickled, to the house.

"Miss Baize," said he, arrived and facing the pursed lips with a confidence that here, at least, the talk would be of his own contribution, "I'm going to take this house. I'm what I think you'd call a single gentleman; there's just

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myself, that's to say; and about all I want is to be fed simply and left alone. I'd occupy only three rooms and probably not furnish the others. Would you care to join up — it won't be for some three or four months yet, by the way — and do for me?"

Miss Baize, pursed to the point of lockjaw, unpursed no word.

"I'd give you, what shall we say? a pound a week. You'd look after me, and I fancy you'd find I should look after you, and I've a sort of feeling that we'd get on rather well together. How do you think about it?"

Miss Baize's lips, prised open as it were by this second direct question, unpursed her thought. "There's that nephew of mine's got to be with me."

"Oh, that's understood. I was coming to that. I've seen Charles up the garden just now and I took rather a fancy to him."

"There's few does," declared Miss Baize, "or ever did except his mother who died on him when he was four."

"Well, there's all tastes," said Exceat, twinkling, unable to resist the opportunity.

Miss Baize's lips appearing to show, however, that in this particular case there was room for but one, he hastened to advance reasons. "He struck me as bright," he said, "and anxious to be useful, I'm sure. He'll help me in the garden and all that, and an idea I've got is to fit him up in a blue serge suit and one of those striped-linen coats,



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pantry-jackets don't they call them, and train him on to help you about the house."

"Well, there's all tastes," said Miss Baize, a shade triumphantly recapturing as it were her own bastion; and Exceat was shortly pedalling forth from an Island House available now, as Mr. Harry Hay, with laugh he thought, might have said, W.S.C. — With Staff Complete.

He reviewed, as he rode back, the report of the Committee of Ways and Means into which he had resolved himself while still he had held in his hand the *Times* containing his first intimation that a residence so near to his heart as Island House had sounded to be was in the world. "Sounded to be" then; now beyond all qualification for or against had proved itself to be; and he now, too, could roughly estimate the outgoings which occupation of it would entail.

Four thousand pounds was being asked for Island House. He would offer £3,500, secure it probably for £3,750, and be ready with say £500 for furnishings and fittings and, as Mr. Harry Hay would say, what-not. Deduct this outlay from his invested capital — in part the savings of nearly thirty-five years, in part a legacy which had devised to him as sole "surviving child or children" of his mother in the cutting-up, not long since, of an estate in which she would have shared — and he would enter into possession with, he reckoned, an annual income of between £700 and £800 a year. It was not a great sum, as ex-

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penses went nowadays, for the upkeep of an Island House as Island House might be kept. For such simple needs as he projected, for the maintenance with himself of Miss Baize and of Charles, it would be much more than ample.

"And I'll take on the first of my staff-costs here," said Exceat to himself, applying the brake to Ashby's bike at a shop front reached within a few doors of Mr. Harry Hay's.

"Geo. Telfer and Son: Jewellers and Silversmith: Certified Opticians: Estb. 1831"—half the establishments on Marketplace displayed an "Estb." followed by a date varyingly remote—made the business of opticians a side-line but, by the air of it, an efficient one. "If I bring a lad down here this afternoon," said Exceat, entered and addressing himself at the optical counter, "could you fit the lenses of his spectacles into a new frame while he waits, or at all events patch up his frame, it's broken, while you make him a new pair?"

"One or the other, sir," responded the representative, "I haven't the least doubt that we could do."

And Exceat went the few paces on to Mr. Harry Hay's smiling, not, oddly enough, in anticipation of all that now awaited his retirement, but in imagination of the Juvenile's delight in a pair of spectacles not dependent on sticking-plaster for its rigidity not yet on string for one of its shafts.

But he was like that.

## Chapter VI

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ON THE DAY on which Exceat, negotiations for his purchase of Island House completed, Mr. Harry Hay's "Amazing Freehold Sacrifice" of it at £4,000 duly brought down to positive immolation of it at £3,750, exchanged his banker's draft in that sum for the title deeds — on that great day completion of his last book, evacuation of London and entry of Quaile, were some three months ahead.

The period flew. Speeding by artificial light as by daylight, his writing accelerated it as only close application to work can accelerate time; and it was hastened further by the hours snatched from it for the enthralling business of making ready — whole days, in example, in flying visits to Quaile for the purposes of furnishing and decorating, "and *item*," as on one of these occasions he smiled to himself while conning over things in the train, "furnishing and decorating of Charles."

It was on such a flying-visit, auspiciously-starred as he subsequently told himself, that he first entered the Market-place antique furniture premises of Alfred Battiscombe (Estb. 1795). Espied through the open doorway, a refectory-table which was his precise idea of a work-table —

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long and narrow so that a chap had an arm's-length range of books and gadgets and pipes on either hand, and rigid so that nothing shook it or rattled upon it — attracted him within; and he was examining it at his leisure in that absence of any sign or sound of attendant which is a characteristic of antique showrooms when, in the same peculiarity of the trade, an occupant came prowling from nowhere more as if he were himself an interested customer than in any degree a salesman.

"Nice piece," indifferently commented this arrival, a greyish old man in a long overcoat and carpet-slippers.

"Uncommonly," agreed Exceat. "What are you asking for it?"

Carpet-slippers turned a ticket this way and that as though he had never seen it before and could make little of it now that he had. "Forty-seven pounds ten," he then remarked.

"You mean to keep it," said Exceat, "and I don't blame you."

Carpet-slippers detached his *pince-nez*, polished them, took a good look at Exceat and smiled agreeably. "Well, that's what the ticket says."

"I don't expect you allow yourself to be dictated to by your tickets. Are you the proprietor? Can I have a look round?"

"It's my business, yes, leastways my name's over the door; but it's more a hobby than a business these days, I'm afraid."

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Exceat was interested. "Your name over the door? D'you mean the business has been in the same family, in your family, since — I noticed the date — 1795, wasn't it?" And as the other seemed to show assent, "I like meeting that kind of thing, you know," he went on; "that sort of continuity in one place."

"It's not uncommon here in Quaile," said Mr. Battiscombe, clearly gratified, nonetheless. "There's Tom Wainwright the saddler over there, and Ned Thomas the bookseller, ah, several of us. That's why" — and he smiled palely — "it's more a hobby than a business with me and with some. Folks don't buy for horses now, nor for libraries, much less for fine old furnishing. We started as cabinet-makers, of course; flourished on making our own and now can't sell anything that's made as furniture used to be. I'll show you round, sir, with pleasure. It's rare to me to meet anyone interested."

And when, as they groped through by-rooms and cellars dustily stacked, Mr. Battiscombe heard that Exceat had taken Island House, — "Exceat, my name is," — he opened a friendliness quite untainted by possibility of his hobby becoming for the nonce a business. He told stories he had had from his father of the place; one, to Exceat's amusement, of an old lady, a great character, who had resided there in considerable state and who, when the railway first came to Quaile, availed herself of its locomotion but not of its accommodation. In her phaeton-and-pair she would be driven to the station, cause her carriage to be lifted onto

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a truck, and seated in it would make the journey to Bath, where she took the waters, where horses would await her to drive her away.

"Show you your house," said Mr. Battiscombe, concluding this, "as it was in her day and before her."

He disappeared, carpet-slippers and all, beneath a rank of tables, and after prolonged burrowing backed out with an elaborately framed engraving of Island House in 1770, showing, to Exceat's profoundest interest, the considerable extension at the back at which he had guessed.

"I'd like you to accept that, Mr. Exceat," Mr. Battiscombe said, "as from one townsman, shall we say, to another." And when Exceat made protests — "No, no," he declared. "I remember well the mountain of dust there was on it when I first came across it long after my father's death up in a loft here with a pile of other old framings. I don't suppose it ever cost us a penny except in a job lot, and I'm absolutely certain none will ever want to buy it. You hang it up, Mr. Exceat, where once it used to hang before. I'd like to think of it there. I'll clean it up for you."

He was making tea, as it had chanced, when Exceat had come in, and pressed him now to share a cup; and while they were at the meal, "My idea's going to be this, Mr. Battiscombe," said Exceat. "The hieroglyphics on your price tickets stand, I know, for your minimum take. If I arrange to spend, say, two hundred pounds here, in filling up the

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rooms I want to furnish, how about you agreeing to read the minimums on the pieces we select together? Eh?"

Mr. Battiscombe, about to raise his cup, set it down hastily. "Two hundred pounds?"

"About that, I'd say."

Mr. Battiscombe took off his *pince-nez* and, applying an antique coloured handkerchief to antique glistening eyes, began, to Exceat's considerable embarrassment, to absorb large quantities of moisture therein. "Not since I was a lad in my father's time," said Mr. Battiscombe chokily; and again, staring upon Exceat mistily, hands on the table before him shaking, "Two hundred pounds . . . Not since I was a lad in my father's time."

And then the furnishing and decorating of Charles—lighting installation of Miss Baize's nephew—already handsomely carried out by Messrs. Telfer's provision of a pair of glittering steel-framed spectacles with, as Charles had joyously acclaimed, "hooks behind me blinkin' earholes."

Relations between Exceat and Charles had already, when the Juvenile's furnishing took place, reached the stage of affectionate exasperation on Exceat's side, genial familiarity as between equals on Charles's, along which they were to intensify when occupation of Island House was actually begun. At every flying visit the Juvenile, eagerly attaching himself to his new master as to a new companion come down specially to amuse him, was called upon to help or

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to do. By the end of the first occasion Exceat's comments on his performances had taken the diction which thenceforward was to be their established form. "Curse you, Charles, why the dickens don't you . . .," "Confound and dash you, Charles, what the blazes have you . . .," they invariably began; with helpless laugh invariably ended.

And Charles grinned over them as they had been blessings.

All delighted grins, all familiarly eager chatter, was he on the day when, meeting by command a flying visit at the station, he was taken by Exceat direct to the working-class outfitters whose whereabouts off Marketplace Miss Baize, at the previous visit, had unpursed to disclose.

No "Estb." claimed roots in the past for this emporium. "All As In Our London Branches" it stridently announced itself; and its window-tickets, in their various voices, clamoured modernity at highest pitch. "Wear For Ever," "Can You Beat It?" "Here's Value," "Our Special Line," proclaimed some; while others, laconically, "Smart," "Latest," "Look!"

Charles hugged himself, Exceat laughed, and they went in and soon were in the thick of it.

Securing the attention of a gentleman in shirt-sleeves and a bowler hat, "We want something better than that, I fancy," Exceat presently was saying, fingering one of a pile of serge-suitings which appeared to be made of a not very pliable roofing-felt.

"Yes, we want something better than that," agreed



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Charles as Shirt-sleeves heaved away the mound and disappeared for another.

Completely at his ease, Charles had taken perch on a high chair beside the counter. The boot and the shoe which still shared the offices of his feet he had tucked on the chair's topmost rung, with the result that he poked his head forward at Exceat between his green-trousered legs rather like a contortionist at a pantomime. "They'll give you anything," he chattily affirmed, "these chaps will, if you let 'em, my Antie says."

"Have you ever bought clothes before?" inquired Exceat, endeavouring by a slight acerbity of voice to suggest that gift-horses were customarily accepted with more of thanks than criticism.

"Not once in me whole life," nodded Charles from between his knees. "Nearest I've ever had is taking 'em in the storeroom at one of me Blind-schools, and you can't call that choosing, neither, when they just bungs a thing in your face and says: 'Here, you,' can you? I ain't half having the treat of my life in here, I promise you"; and he hugged his long arms around his legs, almost meeting together his double-jointed fingers behind his back, rocking himself in an ecstasy of delight. "Damn it, you'll be off that chair in a minute, rolling about like that," Exceat more than once sharply exclaimed, but knew himself more thanked by the performance than by volumes of verbal gratitude, not one word of which the Juvenile expressed, start to finish.

A natty pair (as Exceat called them) of corduroy trou-

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sers for working in the grounds ("Make me feel I've got sort of long yellow worms crawling down me legs," approved Charles, inexpressibly joyed and hungrily fingering then one of a bunch of broad leather belts to wear with them); three grey flannel shirts ("Better than our Scoutmaster's, blowed if they aren't"); vests and pants; army socks; two pantry-jackets ("Won't I half look a guy, though, eh?"); gum-boots and working-boots and house-shoes; dickeys and collars — "Damn it, you haven't got a damn thing fit to wear," exclaimed Exceat a shade exasperatedly when, under the strain of trying-on, first Charles's braces and then his collar-stud gave way and must be replaced with new.

"You're right and that's a fact," agreed Charles. "Vote I keep these braces on right off, eh?"

"Oh, wear the belt, man. You've only got one button on those ghastly trousers of yours that I can see."

"No, here's one to the back, see? Vote I wear the belt as well, though, save carrying it, eh?"

Two enormous parcels and two parcels little short of enormous suggested that no great saving of transport had been effected by wearing the belt. Exceat went out to engage taxi or car, grew hot and angry over the discovery that every car of Marketplace's modest number was serving a wedding at the Parish Church, and hot and angry returned to insist that the parcels must, after all, await the delivery which the shop was unable to give before the late afternoon. But he had gone for a car on account of

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sharing with Charles a keen desire to have the splendid outfit at Island House at once; and when, "You take those two bigger ones and I can easily manage these," the owner of the outfit cheerfully declared, "Oh, come on then," said Exceat, aggravatedly reckless; and off, thus burdened, they set; and why the devil, he very shortly was inquiring of himself, was he, through his fatheaded enthusiasms, for ever letting himself in for things like this?

He loathed a parcel. His loathing of carrying even the smallest package was such that, in the special hell awaiting him, the pains of errand-boy, he often said, would undoubtedly be his assignment. With two miles of country road now to traverse, beneath each arm a package the size, as sweating he told himself, of a blasted rabbit-hutch, and the weight of a ton, he never, he thought, had loathed life more. The parish church had to be passed, wedding guests just leaving. The eyes of his future neighbours, grinning as to the pavement crowd, askance as to the carriage folk, added nothing to his good temper, and his replies to Charles's excited chatter, ecstatically running over each article of his new wardrobe, would, rendered in equivalent of water, have extinguished a house fire.

In no degree, however, his professed-to-be servant.

"Won't Antie half bust herself when she sees us like a couple of Father Christmasses, and all of it for me?" prophesied Charles, calmly watching while Exceat, the gate at last reached, hurled down his loads and with stiffened fingers fumbled with the wicket.

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"What you'll damned well do immediately you get in," declared Exceat exasperatedly, "is to have a good scrub bath, dress yourself, if you're capable of doing it, and then go out and make a bonfire of every shred of that rag-bag stuff of yours. Haven't you even got the manners to open a gate when we get to one?"

"Well, you opened it before I could," said Charles, stepping through in the lead.

"Well, you damn well shut it then," commanded Exceat, barking his parcel-encumbered elbows against the sides as he followed.

But, returned to London that night, he fell asleep laughing to himself as incident by incident, abundantly enjoying it, he went over it all — from its beginning in Charles's ecstasies in the shop to its last scene when, as, sweating, he was arranging the incomparable workroom with proper disposition of Mr. Battiscombe's admirable antiques, Charles, reeking of unaccustomed soap and new corduroys, had come to him, as to a brother, to have his collar buttoned for him.

"Expect I shall get into the way of it soon enough," Charles had remarked, admiring the tie he had brought with him, while Exceat, furious, struggling with board-like collar and the scraggy neck, half strangled him and wished he might.

"Keep your infernal chin up, can't you!"

And, final to this fitting-out of the various branches of

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his enterprise, his own particular purchases for that own especial boyhood self which, first of the past selves buried within him, at Island House was to be rescued from its immurance and enlarged.

If the Wizard had thrilled him when seen only through the windows of the High Holborn shop, not boyhood's rapture itself in a first bike could have equalled his when within the shop he handled it and contrasted its every feature with those of the Wizard of thirty years ago which had been his. Black-enamelled all over, no plated parts to tarnish; and he saw himself importantly busy with sponge and cloth after a long run. Three speeds; a mere commonplace to motorists but a miracle to old-timer of the days of single gear; and he saw himself switching in high for the ascents, low for flat spins, medium for gentle rises. "Though, mind you," said he to his attendant, speaking out of the practice of three decades before as though from daily habit of the hour, "Though, mind you, I always walk hills of any length of steepness; rests your muscles, eases you all over; gives you miles on a long run in my opinion."

The assistant, speaking as a one-time road-racing man, was of opposite opinion, and Exceat was at once into a fascinating argument on the subject; on the respective merits, then, of drop handle-bar and curved; and thence into reminiscences and experiences of the road so that he might have been, it suddenly, as they talked, occurred to him, sitting in the pub with that fellow-cyclist — Hubbard his

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name was—with whom he had picked up while on the tour in Derbyshire which had produced one of his very earliest books, his Peak District guide . . .

Purchase of the glittering Wizard settled, he bought a cyclometer, most necessary of all adjuncts to the delights of a bike. Imagine clicking up the first one hundred miles! Each separate hundred as he reeled it up he would greet by getting off to have a proud stare at it. Each should be logged, the exact place of its occurrence, in his diary. Imagine the first one thousand! He bought then a roomy hold-all bag to hang behind—shove a book in, and grub when out for an all-day run. He bought lastly a most thrilling waterproof cape, made with cunning thumbholes so that in the rain you ride, by gum, in a tent; and he betook himself then to the stamp-dealer's in the Strand, his mind, as he hurried his eager way, gone back to that recollection of that chance-met fellow tourist Hubbard. Fancy remembering the chap's name. Remember it—why, he could remember now every incident of their evening together; the hundred-up at billiards at which he had run out with a marvellous break of fourteen; an absurd game of moonlight croquet with the inn-keeper's two pretty daughters, one of whom, while they searched in the bushes for a ball, he had kissed.

Exceat, at that recollection, laughed at himself; and caught, as he did so, the eye of a pretty girl, a typist or some such, coming out of a Chancery Lane office, who

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smiled back. Buried selves released by environment! Good lord, was the stripling self that had exchanged glad eyes with girls, ay, and kissed 'em, being recovered!

At the stamp-dealer's a truly noble stamp album, superior of his original as his new Wizard was of his old; a standard catalogue for the fascination of identifying every stamp you stuck; a packet of 250 picked foreign issues and of 250 British. Five hundred stamps would give him, by gum, some sorting and checking and arranging to do. Tweezers for handling 'em with; a tile for examination of the watermarks; magnifying glass for their closest inspection. All the gadgets, a thrill with each; and the thrills so fond that he could not but have his purchases parcelled then and there, and that evening — his time his boyhood's now, Quaile next week — spread them out to have a go at them.

The Wizard he had ordered to be delivered to him, all ready for the road, at Paddington Station, on the day of his departure. The *Boy's Own Paper* volumes came to his rooms. To the Shaftesbury Avenue secondhand bookseller at whose shop he had chanced upon the volume vividly remembered he had taken a list of serial stories in early issues which had remained all these years in his mind, Talbot Baines Reid's *My Friend Smith*, and *The Wiltoughby Captains*; Jules Verne's thrillers, *The Clipper of the Clouds*; Ballentine's Wild West Adventures, *The Silver Canyon*. The dealer had undertaken to track down

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the volumes containing these. Four volumes were the result of his search and on the evening of their delivery Exceat could no more resist a preliminary browse over one than, on the day of its purchase, over the stamp-collecting outfit.

Each was wrapped separately. He took the top one from the carton containing the four, found it, to his complete ravishment, to be that containing Jules Verne's *Godfrey Morgan* and was immediately recapturing, from the illustrations, the thrills of the two men wrecked on a desert island to whom drifted a miraculous chest containing every conceivable tool and firearm that castaways could require. Precisely as awaited him at Island House that glorious assemblage of tools for the reclamation of its wilderness!

He had no inclination actually to read the story or any of the stories, and thought it unlikely that he ever would. Throughout the volume it was the pictures, vividly recalled as each came beneath his eye, that gave him what he had known they would give him. His boyhood, as he browsed, stirred so strongly within him, enveloping all his senses, that when at last he closed the book and moved about in preparation for bed he was aware of an odd singing in his ears, an odd numbness in the tread of his feet upon the floor, as though consciously he were walking in the trance back into which the volume had projected him.



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And similarly with the stamp-album. Promising himself, the night he brought it to his rooms, only a peep in which to lay out a page of specimens taken up at random, just to see, once more, what a filled page looked like, it was three hours later when at last he stopped himself. And his table was covered then with the beginnings of a sorting into countries and values. And again, on moving, that odd sense of padding about in a dream-surrounding, the air tenuous, charged with remote, elfin sounds.

On both occasions, got to bed, "Rum," thought he, cogitating alike the fascinations and the phenomena they had produced. As to the first—what joys they would afford when exploited to their full in that unbelievable room of that unbelievable house; as to the second—"That deepest gone self of all, that boyhood self, is there, that's plain enough. The others, then? . . . the old zests . . . the old urge . . . ?"

And so, all readied, all leave-taking made, at last—away!

Farewells all round his circle—none crediting that he really was, as he assured them, going "for good" from them all. Especial farewell of the Crays, who did believe him, but, as Catherine said, believed also *in* him and would hold on to that. Acceptance from Beachy Head at the dinner they gave him of a toy bucket and spade, solemnly presented.

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Away!

At Paddington — the Wizard superbly there to greet him — “Off home for the holidays, by gum!” his thought was, as, for the first occasion of leaving London that he could remember, he took a single ticket instead of a return; and in schoolboy holiday spirit he made the journey and at Quail, thrill of thrills, having given direction for his luggage to be sent along, got himself upon his gleaming mount.

The mile to Marketplace and then the two miles to Island House — each as it came up on the cyclometer fascinatedly noted — were covered by progression that not possibly could he feel as riding. Alike by virtue of his spirits and of the qualities of the Wizard, free-wheeling as if propelled by hidden magic, they were floated. He waved his hat to his milestone, waved it again to his griffins upon his gateway. He caused the Wizard’s silvery bell to herald, all the way up the drive, his arrival. He had his front door opened to him by an almost delirious Charles, habited for the occasion, and for the first time, in pantry-jacket, dicky and black bow-tie; the bow out of sight but proclaimed by its band, strangle-tight.

“I spend all me time,” Charles greeted him, “got up like this, looking at meself in that there long glass in the hall there, blowed if I don’t.”

“I’ll give you stiffer jobs than that, my boy, now I’ve come on deck. Hullo, Miss Baize; jolly of you to come

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out. Well, here I am, and what d'you think of this for a bike, eh? I wouldn't swap it, d'you know, for a fleet of Rolls-Royces."

"Well, there's all tastes," unpursed Miss Baize.



PART TWO

He Adventures



# Chapter I

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EXCEAT did not, as the phrase has it, "get to know people" in Quaile. When he had been there a few months he had some genial friendships among the elder brethren of the tradesmen of Marketplace, Mr. Battiscombe of the antiques, Mr. Wainwright the saddler, Mr. Thomas the second-hand bookseller, old Mr. Irons who captained the East Indiaman grocery, Mr. Thorn the ironmonger who sold him his armoury of felling, excavating and gardening implements. Also he struck up with two young people of gentler birth than these but in positions of dependence, not exercising the influence of home-dwellers. With the residents of the district, politely ready though he was to be neighbourly as occasion might arise, he was far too engrossed with his diversions to spare thought for seeking such occasions, and that he was not, in any case, to find them was settled for him by the outcome of two calls paid at Island House when he had been there little more than a fortnight.

Cards were left on him by those influential centres of Quaile society, the Rectory and the Manor; by Canon Skryne-Turner, a mild silvery-faced little man, who hoped

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to find in him an addition to his flock, and by Brigadier Sir Marmaduke Eridge, chairman, amongst other dignities, of the local Bench, who was in appearance an interesting cross between a sergeant-major and a gorilla and who counted on recognizing in an owner of property one who would join with him in Stamping Out things, a form of extermination of personal affronts and public abuses to which he gave a passionate and full-time devotion.

Exceat was from home on both occasions; on the first, that of the Canon, twenty miles away on his bicycle; and on the second, that of the Brigadier, twenty feet down an unsuspected hole at the top of the grounds into which he had fallen and in which he remained for three quarters of an hour exasperatedly cursing the high enjoyment and futile help of Charles, peering down at him from the perilous brink above. ("There goes me glasses now, fell off me face on top of you, if you could just pitch 'em up." "Blast your glasses. Can't you tie that rope in a knot that will hold, you incredible idiot you?")

Absence when called on is no social offence but it happened that on the occasion of both calls Miss Baize was out marketing, Charles enjoying a siesta at the Canon's ring and engaged as has been seen at the Brigadier's, and to both visitors the front door stood unanswered. The Canon's wife thought this "Funny" and registered an asterisk of suspicion against the newcomer; the Brigadier, who snuffed affront through his hairy nostrils with the range and accuracy of a stag scenting danger in the breeze,



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thought it "Irregular" and set himself to count the days that should elapse before, by return of his courtesy, amends should be made.

He had a long time to count, as had had the Canon's wife, also, metaphorically speaking, standing on her asterisk to watch from the window for due response to her husband's overtures. The calls had been paid while Exceat was still fully occupied either in getting straight settling in or in almost crazy pursuit alike of his wilderness-taming in the grounds and of his cyclometer on the front wheel of his bicycle over the countryside. He gave his callers' cards no more than a glance ("Dash; what a nuisance") and by the time he was both reasonably in order and more moderately following a planned routine had as good as forgotten the matter. Entirely, in any case, he had forgotten the names inscribed on the pasteboards which Charles, never previously having seen the like, and justified by daily repetitions of "Charles, will you keep this hall-table tidy, dash you" had added long since to his cigarette-card collection.

Mrs. Skryne-Turner, whose charitableness was done for her, she no doubt felt, by her husband, spread her report, thus prejudiced, on the new-comer; Sir Marmaduke, whose normal sufferance was as that of a Bengal tiger with a sore foot, roared his. And Exceat's social standing in Quaile not only, in the result, was sealed in the sense of being determined for him unheard but in the sense also of being closed up before it had opened.

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It did not worry him. He was not indeed conscious of it. When Jocelyn Pryde, Jo Pryde as they called her, said to him one day "You don't know anyone here, do you?" "Don't I?" he replied, surprised. "No, by Jove, I suppose I don't—not the residents, that's to say. However, I know you."

She gave him that dazzling smile of hers.

He first met Jo Pryde at Craddock's Circulating Library, "Estb." (at 12 Marketplace) "1827," and always spoken of in Quaile by the full title which stood in old-fashioned lettering above the door. "Left my reading-glasses at Craddock's Circulating Library, send immediately," was, for instance, a telegram once sent by Mrs. Skryne-Turner, gone on a visit to London, to the Canon. Three words for the place of mislaying where one had sufficed, and that by one who, when she used the telegraph service, spent almost as long over condensing her message as it took to reach its destination; and it was precisely his pleasure in the old-fashioned sound that attracted Exceat there instead of to a garish multiple rival.

On the day on which he first went in, an occasion never, on account of the meeting which there befell him, to be forgotten for the rest of his life, he had been at Island House a month. A proper part of the difference between his new life and his old would be, it had occurred to him, a subscription in Marketplace, Quaile, for light reading in place of the services towards the compilation of his one

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hundred and eleven hitherto rendered him by the research shelves of the London Library in St. James's Square; and in his pleasant way "I'm afraid it's only detective stories you'll find me reading" he told Miss Marbles, Craddock's librarian, when he paid his fee.

Miss Marbles, a pop-eyed martyr to chronic indigestion and to the complaints of subscribers who, one and all, suspected her of favouritism, directed him wanly to the shelves where he was likely to be suited; and Exceat, happily browsing, had just extended his right hand to the very book he wanted when his eye was caught, to his left, by another title of which he had favourably heard. It resulted that his hand went in one direction, his eyes in another, and he was startled considerably at the touch of another hand — cool, firm yet satin smooth, somehow vibrant — against his own, and at the sound then of a voice — clear, gay, also somehow tingling — "*Bags I!*"

The touch, preceding the voice, flashed his attention towards it in the brief moment between the two, and he saw immediately the hand only with its slender wrist, the fingers drooping, poised there on the book as flower dropped upon dark water. A lovely thing. A perfection in flesh, as exquisitely wrought as tinted, such as, in his sudden apprehension of it, in its own suddenness and in its apparent completion in itself, belonging to support no more than fallen blossom to its tree, was lovelier to him that anything (he afterwards thought) could be but to

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the ungoverned rapture with which loveliness is beholden in a dream.

He never forgot that hand as then he saw it.

She to whom it belonged was stood, as now he looked at her, as far to the chosen book's right as he to its left. Her left arm was stretched towards it at the same angle as his right arm. In reaching out for it she had perhaps glanced aside as he had glanced aside. At their hands touching she was perhaps as startled as he had been startled. And their eyes now met with the ring in their ears of her cry "*Bags I!*"

He laughed aloud. "Ha, it's a lot of years since I last heard that expression."

"It must be," she laughed back, "quite a lot since I last used it. I hadn't an idea that I was going to. It just jumped out."

She looked to be what he would generalize in young people as "about twenty." She was of a fairness of colouring and of a radiance of vitality such as gave, he thought, positively a dazzle to the childlike loveliness that her face had.

"Isn't there," he said, "some answer, some retort, to it? One chap cries '*Bags I!*' and the other, don't I remember—?"

"No, I think you don't. You're mixing it up, I expect, with '*Quis? — Ego!*' *Bags I* is just *Bags I*; getting it in first. But, I say, that was rum, wasn't it, '*Bags I*' shooting out of

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me like that quite unintended? I only ever used it with a cousin in his holidays when we were kids; never since, I'll swear. Rum, eh?"

She had become, as she questioned, quite serious. The "rumness" of the point appeared profoundly to interest her.

"It's not likely to be," he suggested, "because I'm like your cousin?"

Her seriousness vanished. "Good God, no," she amused him by replying. "He'd have been about fourteen at the time, to begin with."

"Ah, I'm a shade more than that," said Exceat thoughtfully; at which it was her turn to be amused. "Was it some similarity, perhaps," he went on, "in the occasion?"

"Well, that's what I was wondering." The gravity shadowed her eyes again. "That's why I called it rum. Was it some of this subconscious stuff, do you think — would it have been, I mean, that the last time I cried 'Bags I' I had unexpectedly touched someone's hand as I touched yours just now?"

"It's very possible. Are you interested in that, in what you call subconscious stuff?"

She said with the plain directness of a child, "Yes, I am. Heaps. Are you?"

His eyes and his lips showed his amusement at the word. "Heaps," he joined.

But nothing, apparently, was droll in it to her. "I'm glad you are," she said, matter-of-fact as before. "There's

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skits in it, I'm certain. Are you staying here? I heard you joining up on the library just now."

"I never noticed you. Yes, I've just come to live here."

"Oh, that's going to be jolly," she cried, her manner, to his renewed amusement, precisely as if, of mutual age, they were seated side-by-side, formally introduced, at a dinner-party. "Come to live where exactly?" she went on.

"At Island House they call it. Do you know it?"

"I've explored in the grounds; a jolliest place, I've always thought it. It really is like an island, isn't it?"

"It absolutely is; that's why I took it."

"Oh, larks. You like island sort of stuff?"

"As much as I like subconscious sort of stuff."

She laughed. "We're a pair of us. Well, I'm off"; and as she turned to leave — "My name's Pryde, Jo Pryde they call me."

"Mine's Exceat. Are you taking that book you bagged?"

She pointed to a book under her arm. "No, I'm sticking to this. I'll leave that one for you, as you're new."

"A most gracious action."

He bowed mock-courtly with his mock-courtly phrase; and with a grimace of her lips, almost a putting out of her tongue, she mocked back; and with that for good-bye went to the desk of Miss Marbles — atrabiliously watchful through her pop-eyes of such enviably eupeptic behaviour — and thence from the shop, leaving him.

He took the book she had bagged, reaching direct to it not by guidance of its title but by impressed memory of

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its exact position (where that hand had poised) on its shelf, and went out then to where his bicycle awaited him. It was a ritual with him on this now familiar run to Island House to cease pedalling at established points, interestedly observing the length of free-wheel spin that would follow. Today, his mind otherwise occupied, he pedalled home as the Wizard chose to run; the ritual neglected.

For what was the first time for many months he dreamt again that night of Jack, again awaking, as so often from vision of her, to hear his voice crying "Jack, Jack!" in the darkness.

But the voice he this time heard was not, as customarily, an eager, calling voice. The voice of which his ears suddenly were conscious was a bated voice; awed, uncertain, as though in mingling of a wonder and a doubt. And he realized, lying awake then and recalling his dream, that the tone of his cry was occasioned by the odd fact that Jack, who had been gipsy-hued, this time had appeared to him in colouring vividly fair.

## Chapter II

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GOSSIP had a lot to say about Exceat before he had been long at Island House. In the earlier part of his residence in Quaile he did a number of "very funny" things — very funny in the extraordinary-way-to-behave, in the Mrs. Skryne-Turner, sense of the term; and it was on these that gossip fastened.

He was seen, that was one of the things, two or three times (dozens of times in gossip's version) leading to his house a stray dog on a string. He often was observed, that was another, helping errand-boys with their delivery cycles, and on market-days working-class mothers with their purchase-laden prams, up Furlong Hill. His familiarity with some of the tradespeople in Marketplace was a third. His almost daily visits by "that Clive Shand young man" and his intimacy with "that Jo Pryde girl," both so much younger than himself, were a fourth and fifth. His taking into his establishment of "that dreadful Old Chairmender" was, outrageously, a sixth.

There were dozens of these extraordinary-things-to-do that Exceat did, and that a man able to live in a place like Island House, and obviously of some claims to breeding, should not do. All, to speak generally, were of a type with



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what he did on that morning when he bought Charles his outfit of clothes. By nearly everyone attending that wedding that day he had been seen, laden with huge parcels, walking with "that common nephew of his housekeeper," similarly laden. A gentleman does not go about burdened like an errand-boy and with an errand-boy. That this newcomer had done so was commented on pretty widely; and when his behaviour in the matters of the Canon's and Sir Marmaduke's calls became known, "That proves," cried the coteries, "what we had already heard about him." Some said he did not return the calls because he knew no better; others, with a laugh at their own wit, that it was because he did know better — knew better than to do so, that was to say. The point, this way or that, was joined to the parcel-carrying incident and set in train the spectacular variety of stories which in time collected about him; their number legion, their common feature that each was possessed, as gossip commonly is, of a devil.

That Exceat drank; that he was an ex-convict of the gentlemanly, the embezzling sort; that he was hiding from his creditors; that he was a Soviet agent, decoying workshys to his house for the purpose of enflaming them with Communism; that he was a vivisector, dog-stealing for the practice; that he kept a woman there; that he affected the society of boys and youths; that he had got hold of that young Clive Shand; that he was the father of Charles by a parlourmaid at one time in his wife's service; that he had deserted his wife and child; that he was a Nudist,

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that — Each by each they were started, dropped, superseded, resuscitated, remodelled, started anew.

And Exceat, absorbed, abundantly happy in his recreations (his “re-creations” as, noticing their effect upon himself, he called his diversions) gave no other heed to such of the stories as reached him than greatly to enjoy them.

To enjoy, in example, the story that he was a Nudist: a good example since it shows also on what foundations such legends will arise — floors, turrets, pinnacles leaping from shallowest base as the construction passes from builder to builder, the story from mouth to mouth.

It was in early November that he took up residence at Island House; but the weather was mild and he was able forthwith to adopt for his working-kit in the grounds the wear, blue serge shorts and open-throated shirt, to which the rising boyhood in him had looked forward amain. Characteristically of his regard for the set of his clothes, he had the shorts made for him by his tailor, gloried in the feel of the kit when on the second morning after his arrival he got into it for the first time, but felt a trifle self-conscious nevertheless when, coming down to breakfast, his staff must be faced.

Miss Baize he had hoped to avoid until, having done a morning’s digging in the garb, he would have, he knew, the don’t-care feeling of the man who leaves his house for Ascot feeling a conspicuous ass in his grey topper and tails but returns prepared to walk in the rig anywhere and before any eyes. Miss Baize happened, however, to be in

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the feeding-room when he entered and the situation had to be met.

"Hope you recognize me in this stuff, Miss Baize. Absolutely the finest kit in the world to my mind."

Miss Baize who had stared upon him, pursed, visibly swallowed her own views. "Well, there's all tastes," she admitted.

So that, he relievedly felt, was that, and so far as Miss Baize was concerned he might have known it and need not have worried about it.

Charles, because equally characteristic in his own sort, was less easy to get past. Pantry-jacketed, entering with the bacon-dish while Exceat, overcoming the craven impulse to hide his bare knees at the table, stood about to be viewed and get it over. "Hullo, then!" cried Charles. "You never told me you was a Scout too."

"I'm not."

"Scoutmaster I mean, of course."

"Nothing to do with Scouts. This is for digging in the grounds."

"Well anyone would think you was scouting," grinned Charles, "and I tell you what I vote, I vote I wear my Scout things too and we'll look jolly well the pair of us together."

"You'll wear your corduroys and be jolly thankful you've got them. Are you going to put that dish down or do I eat from it this morning while you hold it?"

Charles with the loud cock-eyed chuckles with which

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he always greeted his master's attempts at sarcasm put it down, and after, as was his habit, a few cheerful remarks on matters entertaining to himself, retired; and Exceat entered from that moment into the full freedom of shorts and shirt, both as granted by his staff's acceptance of him in them and as experienced by their feel. Never of a morning he jumped into them without getting a thrill out of doing so. As autumn and winter passed along, his body, muscled-up by his labours in the grounds, became impervious in his airy kit to the shrewdest weather. He added to his "re-creations" the re-creation of his skin by giving it fullest opportunity of breathing. On a sunny March morning, engaged in the laborious job of barrowing breeze for the paths he was constructing high up the grounds, he took off his shirt.

"Stripped to the waist," he cried to Charles, who had been down to the house for the midday malt-extract and cocoa with which Exceat was trying to put flesh onto his rickety bones.

"Here, I'll do that too," cried Charles putting hands to his jumper.

"Good God, boy, you'd die. Sit in that sun there and have your rest after your dope as I've told you."

Thereafter, stripped-to-the-waist work became an accustomed practice when labour was hard enough and weather sufficiently kind. He would be seen thus stripped by tradesmen coming to the house and by carters bringing up his loads of breeze, of drain-pipes, of manure. He also thus

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would be, no doubt, extravagantly described by Charles who had an immensely long tongue relating to "my boss" when among his cronies. And young Clive Shand, coming up to see him one day, and confronted a first time by him shirtless and bare-legged, gave a laugh and said, "Is that your regular working kit? Ha, that explains it."

Exceat dropped the drain-pipe with which he was staggering. "Hello, Clive; jolly glad to see you. Yes, this is my usual natty dress up here, as near to the suit I was born in as I can decently get. What does it explain exactly?"

"Well, they say about the place, you know, that you're a Nudist."

Exceat laughed. "Do they? They're damn near right, by gum."

But the young man was frowning. "Yes, but *Nudist*, you know. When gossipers apply the term they don't say it, so to speak, with flowers."

"No, with innuendoes, of course; I do myself, I suppose. Fauns and nymphs leaping about after one another and all that."

"Y-e-s." Clive spoke slowly. He was still frowning.

"You don't mean to say," asked Exceat, amused, "that people are crediting me with doing that sort of stuff up here?"

The young man did not reply.

Exceat gave a delighted laugh. "Is that what you're frowning about? Good lord, man, I think it's gorgeous." And he said then to Clive Shand a thing he was in the

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habit of saying. "Man alive, I've never, all my life, cared tuppence what untruths people may say about me, however monstrous or grotesque. My old father taught me that and why the dickens should one? It's when the thing I hear said is true, when I know myself found out, that I'm dismayed."

"That's you all over," Clive smiled at him.

A close friendship had by then developed between these two.

## Chapter III

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CLIVE SHAND had first been met on the day following that first meeting with Jo Pryde. A significance was to be realized later in this juxtaposition of encounters. At the time Exceat marked the second as having taken place on an occasion outstandingly momentous in itself—the occasion, no less, of his completion of five hundred miles ridden on the Wizard.

To behold this most thrilling figure on his cyclometer—five times more thrilling than the thrill of each of the one hundreds which had preceded it—he had gone out to do a little run of miles precisely ten. And it was as he was just completing the ninth of these—the one remaining would bring him, he was hoping, exactly to his gates—that, literally, he ran into Clive Shand.

He had slowed down to walking pace in order to watch come up on the cyclometer the 9 that would show 499 registered, and it proved to have been well that he had done so. Bent forward over the Wizard's handle-bar, gaze peering down at the dial on the hub, he had no eyes for the bicycle ambling ahead of him in his own direction until suddenly he was aware of his front-wheel nosing a rear-wheel.

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"Oh, damn, sorry!" he called, performing the expert balancings necessary to avoid a double spill; and then to the other similarly performing, "I really am most frightfully sorry," he cried. "Of all the goat-headed things to do, ramming you like that!"

The other, also recovered, smiled pleasantly back. "That's all right," he forgave. "You could only have been crawling, luckily. What were you doing? Dreaming? I dreamt bang into a pond myself only yesterday."

Exceat laughed and took stock, and, immediate as always in his estimates, took liking.

This was a tall and slim young man in the middle twenties. Bareheaded in the fashion of the day, he showed a face and brow markedly intellectual. His smile was delightful, his voice very attractive. His hair was very black. It was trimmed close, Exceat with approval saw, and with approval he noticed also that hatlessness was the young man's only deference to modern youth's dress. He wore the customary grey flannel trousers and tweed jacket but they appeared to have been taken not, as is the vogue, from a rag-bag but seemingly from a press and a hanger. His complexion was pleasantly dark. He was in his colouring and in his hair, it occurred to Exceat, studying him, the most striking contrast possible to that vivid gold and fairness of that Jo Pryde whom yesterday he had met and whose hues Jack had so strangely taken in his dream of her last night. (And this was a juxtaposition of thought which also, as was to turn out, was significant.)



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Exceat said, answering the "dreamt myself bang into a pond," "No, I wasn't dreaming this time, though I've landed myself that way before now. I was doing something much more exciting — watching my cyclometer click up the last mile before it notches 500."

The other, pedalling beside him, smiled. "That's an event, is it?"

"It is. Each hundred is an event with me, so you can imagine the first half-thousand. You ought to have a cyclometer, I see you haven't; it's half the fun of the thing. But perhaps you don't bike for the fun of it, as I do?"

"I might if I had a Rolls-Royce bike like yours. No, I just amble round for something to do. I borrow this appalling old bit of scrap iron from the gardener where I'm staying."

"Staying? You don't live here then?"

"No, I'm putting in a job to earn my keep. Do you live here?"

"I do, but I'm not precisely the oldest inhabitant. I've only just come here as a matter of fact, just taken this house we're coming towards."

"Oh, you're the Island House man, are you? I heard there'd been a move in. A jolly place, I'd imagine."

"Suits me," said Exceat, "as if I'd decreed it"; and to his pleasure the other took up the reference of the unusual word.

"Ah, like Kubla Khan?" the young man smiled.

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"Good on you! You know the poets?"

"Here and there." They were come now to the road-fork in which Island House made its island and the young man nodded towards the sweep of the boundary wall and smiled at Exceat and added:

"So twice five miles of fertile ground  
With walls and towers were girdled round."

"I say, we'll have to get together," cried Exceat, further pleased. "Excuse me talking for a bit though," and he bent forward to peer down at his cyclometer. "The red 8 has just come up on this thing, eight tenths of my last mile, you know. The whole 499 will begin to shift in a second. There it goes! Hold on with me, won't you, during this thrilling spasm; don't buzz off. I'm going to crawl now so as to make the 500 just ooze up. Gosh, this is thrilling. Can you see it?" He raised his eyes to glance ahead. "I'm hoping beyond anything on earth that she'll click the 500 absolutely as I reach my gates."

The other, laughing at this excitement, appeared to catch its infection. "I hope so too. We're pretty near. How much to go?"

"Nine tenths sliding up; neck and neck with the 499. How near are we?"

"About a hundred yards. Will she do it?"

"I believe she will. The whole 499's gone over the top. How near now?"

"Fifty. It's a lick."

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"By gad, it is. Reserves coming up hard now. Whole top of the 500 showing. How near?"

"About a cricket-pitch. Hustle her for pity's sake."

"Wish I could. Shall I twiddle about a bit, do you think?"

"Not if she's almost up."

"She is, she is!" Exceat fairly shouted. "Up!" he then cried.

"Here!" simultaneously cried the other; and both dismounted; and "Plumb to the gate" breathed Exceat, ecstatic. "Look at her, man. 500 plumb to a hair! Isn't that marvellous?"

He raised a face from the figures as it might have been that of a mother looking up from the cradle of her first-born; and "Hats off, gentlemen," solemnly pronounced the young man, in his turn bending to look, "only I haven't got one unfortunately. Heil 500!" and he stretched out his right arm Nazi-wise; and they both laughed; and "Come on in" said Exceat, "we must have a drink to this. My name's Exceat, by the way."

"Mine's Shand — Clive Shand."

Shand? Pushing their bicycles up the drive, "Shand, Clive Shand?" Exceat's back brain as they talked was puzzling, "Where the dickens have I heard that name recently?" And still while they collected bottled beer from the feeding-room, "Shand? somewhere I've come across it?"

Their beer obtained, Exceat led into the workroom.

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"By Jove, this is a room!" the young man exclaimed, standing on the threshold and looking all about the delightful apartment, eyes especially for the two work-tables in the opposed windows. And he added "By Jove, I could write in here!"

The addition, fervently uttered, was spoken more to himself than to another. Exceat caught it though; and, as Sterne's gentleman upon Sterne, turned quick upon him with the most civil triumph in the world. "What, you're a writer, are you? Shand? Clive Shand? By Jove, I've fixed you now. Weren't you awarded the Hedgerow Literary Medal the other day?"

Clive Shand coloured pleasantly. "I was," he said. "If back in the spring is the other day."

"That Hedgerow Award counts backwards and forwards a mighty long stretch," said Exceat deliberately. "It's well known to be in a class quite different from the bazaar kind. I say," and he extended his hand, "I'm uncommonly interested to meet you."

The Hedgerow prizeman gave an obviously appreciative grip. "And you?" he inquired. "I'd lay a bet this is a writing-man's room. I sensed it the moment I came in."

Exceat laughed. "You brought the feel in with you, that's why. I? Why, yes and no; yes in the Grub-street definition of writing, emphatically no in the Hedgerow sense, and firmly retired anyway." He waved aside the other's attempt at conventional expostulation. "No, really I mean it. I was just a book-merchant in my day, a free-

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lance in covers instead of in columns. But you, man, you. This really is an event — why didn't I have champagne in the house instead of beer? — for I well remember now the tone of the things said about your work when the award was made. What was the name of the book?"

The younger also did his waving in deprecation of this kindly warmth. "*Full Fathom Five*," he then said.

Exceat, filling his pipe, made a recognizing gesture with his hands. "I remember. I remember being struck by the title and looking up the verse and being struck anew. 'Nothing of him that doth fade' — how does it go on?"

Clive Shand quoted:

"Nothing of him that doth fade,  
But doth suffer a sea-change  
Into something rich and strange."

"That's it. Those were the lines that struck me and I intended at once to get the book but of course never did. I was working —"

"Why those lines, I wonder. It's odd, because they're the burthen of what I was trying to say."

Exceat replenished his glass for him. "You tell me that? Why the dickens isn't this champagne? Was your theme, then, to do with — I remember they said of your stuff that it was mystical — to do with, with, how shall I put it? sort of storage up in ourselves of the developments we go through?"

Young Shand nodded. "It was to do with that. It's a theory of mine."

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Exceat nodded back. "And mine, man."

"Really? Is it? I say, that's rather jolly, finding someone —"

"Jolly! To me, at my age, finding ideas of mine in a man of yours with all your life before you to exploit them in is worlds beyond jolly, it's marvellous. I'll get that book today if I have to wire to town for it."

Young Shand laughed. "You certainly would have to and to the publisher direct if you wanted to save time. My books don't sell, you know; worse luck."

His look, with this admission, betrayed his laugh; and "Don't you worry about that," Exceat, noticing it, told him. "That'll come — can't fail to to a Hedgerow man."

"It's failed hopelessly in three attempts."

"They'll be reprinting in thousands one of these days. Tell me about it all, won't you?"

The boy gave the man the look that youth, out of that loneliness in which it is exiled alike by its hopes and its doubts, its illusions and its disillusion, desirous of understanding as a stranger in a far country, sometimes will give to maturity. "I'd love to," he said.

He stayed to lunch, Charles highly amused at having a visitor to wait on and, as they concluded the meal and lit cigarettes, so openly interested in the conversation as to be observed by Exceat, while young Shand spoke, leaning with both hands on the table the better to listen to him.

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"Why not draw up a chair and sit down while you're about it, Charles?"

"Well, I would," said Charles, unabashed, "only me antie's got me dinner hot waiting."

"Well, shove off and eat it, man. We're not talking to you."

"Oh, I don't mind only listening," politely conceded Charles, cock-eyedly grinning as he betook himself.

"My irrepressible freak," commented Exceat, as the door closed upon him. "I shall one day either hit him with an axe and bury his body up the garden or formally adopt him and make him my heir."

Clive Shand laughed, then was grave. "I believe I almost envy him," he said, and sighed.

"Not his appearance?" As though he had not noticed the sigh, Exceat's rejoinder was light, but he spoke in a voice to encourage, not to chaff; and the young man responded.

"No, his living in this house. It's difficult, of course, to dissociate a house from its owner, and you've been so wonderfully friendly in letting me bleat about myself, and in entertaining me, that in this case I daresay it's impossible; but do you know there's something about this house of yours, it started of course in that perfect workroom, that appeals to me beyond any roof I've ever been under or even imagined. Funny, eh?"

Exceat pushed the cigarettes towards him. "Go on telling me about yourself," he said.

## Chapter IV

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IT'S FAILED hopelessly in three attempts," young Shand had already told.

He meant three novels written, and success, in terms of popular appreciation, thrice missed; and as much could have been divined by any of experience in such matters who studied the Press notices reprinted on the wrapper of *Full Fathom Five* or those accorded to that novel itself. Critics of discernment there showed themselves approving in high degree; and popular taste runs not with cultured, wide sales, not with the eulogy of considered judgment. Progressively Shand's three books had brought him critical praise; diminishingly profit.

His first novel, "Showing promise," had earned him, he now told Exceat, £22.12.11. His second, "Of considerable promise," £18.9.4. His latest, *Full Fathom Five*, "Of rich promise," and crowned by the Hedgerow Award, to date, £16.2.1.

"Fifty-seven pounds, four and fourpence," concluded young Shand, producing the total out of his head with patness of bitter familiarity, "for five years' work. It's not precisely encouraging, is it?"

Exceat refolded the three or four Press cuttings from



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opinions particularly distinguished which, rather pathetically carried about with him, the boy had produced from a breast-pocket, and returned them. "Shand," he said, "look for your encouragement, when you feel the need of it, there, in those, not in your bank-book. They're pressed down and overflowing with it; they really are remarkable. And I'll tell you the thing that strikes me most about them; it is that of your third attempt, *Full Fathom*, which I'm wiring for today —"

"No, because I'm presenting you with a copy, may I? I'll bring it over this evening."

"Noble fellow! I'll sit up all night reading it and I'll take a bet with you now that if you'll inscribe it it will be worth one day all the fifty-seven, four, four, that your whole shoot has fetched this far. Is it a bet?"

"May you win it!"

Exceat smiled at the tinged pleasure on the other's face, and with the brush of sincerity set himself to paint more. "I'll win it all right; and what was I saying when I broke off to book it? Ah, yes, the thing that has struck me particularly in the reviews of *Full Fathom*. It is that there, writing of your third book, mind you, still they are speaking of the promise you show. Too often, haven't I seen it? promise is shown in a first book and belied in its successors. When you get it in a first attempt and again, more fully, in a second, and yet again, more fully yet, and Hedgerow-endorsed, in a third, why, man," — he leant across the table between them and tapped it impressively, — "the performance is

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still to come. And by that slow yet steady growth is certain to come. That's your encouragement, Shand, that neither have you, as do so many, failed in performance and shown that, after all and despite the promise, it isn't in you, nor, this is the point, have you done it yet." He tapped the table again. "It's still in you. You're going to fetch it out of yourself in your next."

Young Shand reached out towards the hand that had tapped, and gripped it. "Thank you, Mr. Exceat."

"Ah, spare us the 'Mr.' Come on; shall we go half an hour into the room you feel you could write in, or up to my engineering works up the grounds?"

Clive Shand elected for the workroom, exclaiming again when they re-entered it on its perfection as a room to work in. "This table here," he exclaimed, "I declare it makes my hand fairly itch for my pen. There *is* something, something affinitive between this room and me, I swear there is."

"Well, I've an idea about that," said Exceat. "I'll tell you presently what it is. Tell me first what you're doing down here in Quaile. You said, didn't you, that you're not a resident, that it isn't your home?"

"No, I'm doing a bread-and-butter job down here, that's all; secretary — or sort of secretary, it's a comic business — to a man. That's what I live on, bread-and-butter jobs. As to a home, I haven't had a home, do you know, since I was a kid of twelve." He took his eyes about the room. "And, by God, don't I want one — " He turned about and looked

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through the window up the garden “— of my own,” he then said.

An odd sensation came over Exceat, watching him. He had the feeling that he was in a book, or was watching a play, and that, compelled thereto by the author's or the actor's art, he was lifted out of himself and was identifying himself with one of the characters he followed. Character of what rôle? Of something tutelary; no, deeper than that, of something paternal. Yes, that was it! The situation he was following — in a book, in a play — was that of fatherhood; of a son claiming guidance of a father; of a father yearning towards a son.

He said, “Sit there at that table as you like it so much; it's a jolly nice chair; and tell us about it. Got your pipe? Good. The jar's in front of you. I'll sit here. Do tell; I'd love to know.”

The story Clive Shand told began, as with a twist of a smile he told, with the slamming in his life of a great door. “I was at this prep. school, you see,” he presently was saying, “when it happened. It was just after my twelfth birthday. This aunt of mine who had rushed down to my home when the news came and taken charge had carefully arranged it with my headmaster that I should arrive in the afternoon after the funeral was all over; but something went wrong with the plans, someone had blundered as with the Light Brigade, and the old horse-cab that took me up

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from the station — I can smell it now and see myself sitting in it in my Sunday clothes with a black tie they'd put on me, all numb sort of, and bewildered — the old horse-cab landed me at the house past a line of carriages and with the hearse at the door and the two coffins just coming across the hall as I stepped in. Awful, eh, for a kid of twelve who'd been an only child and fairly lived in his parents? I imagine it sort of crashed the truth on me. What my headmaster had told me — 'Your mother and father, my dear Clive . . . rather a bad accident in their car. . . . I'm afraid, dear boy . . .' — all that had left me knowing but not realizing, if you can understand. It was the coffins, two of them, one behind the other, that crashed it on me. I with my school bag in one hand and my cap in the other blocking the way so they couldn't get out, you understand, and my poor aunt standing there just petrified with the ghastliness of the thing."

Clive Shand stopped, and, turning a shoulder, fumbled with a box of matches. Exceat, in a book or watching a play — a son telling a father, his own boy telling him — murmured "Ghastly, yes."

Shand dropped the matches. "I made what must have been a dreadful scene. I cried out — " He broke off. "I say, I can't imagine why I'm telling you all this."

"Put it down to the influence of the room."

Shand turned his eyes about him. "I believe it is, partly. A home taking me back to my own home. But it's ridiculous of me; it's rather rotten bad form."

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"I've asked you to. Go on; you cried out, you were saying."

"Yes, I put out my hands against the front coffin, stopping it, and I cried out in a very shrill voice, I can hear it now; 'But I want to see them. Oh, but I must see them.'"

"My aunt" — he twisted a smile — "my unfortunate aunt, standing behind me, put her arms over my shoulders and her hands on my hands and drew me away and to her and sort of mothered me up and told me 'With God now' and all that kindly-meaning stuff. And I said,

" 'Which is mum?'

" 'Darling, that one.'

" 'Which is Dad?'

" 'Darling, this.'

"And then the coffins began to get past, and what the dickens do you think I said? I called out 'Oh, is he tidy?'

" 'Darling — *tidy*? ' my unhappy aunt questioned. And I cried 'Dad couldn't bear things to be untidy about him.' And then came that slam of a door I was telling you about. A hell's own slam. They were all out of the house, my aunt and all, and my old nurse had got hold of me, and the wind caught the front door, I suppose, and it slammed like the last trump. And ever since then, right down to now, if I hear a door slam I go — "

He stretched out a hand towards Exceat and slowly closed the fingers into a tense contraction, the muscles of his face also contracting.

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"That's bad," Exceat said.

"It's odd. I've thought about it a lot, trying to overcome it. It's odd because that slam, leaving me there with my old nurse, whom I at once shook off, was in fact a shutting-in, just as my reaction ever since to the sound is a sort of squeezing-down, or in, of myself. But I felt it to be, and I feel it now when it comes, a shutting-out."

He told, explaining the shutting-out he meant, of wandering then about the house from familiar room to familiar room, standing on the threshold of each, wide-eyed, dry-eyed, in his stiff Sunday suit but entering none.

"You know, I somehow couldn't. Something that used to be there in each room, and that used to welcome me, somehow had gone and I stood there — not wanted, shut out."

From object to object in each room his eyes had travelled, table to chair, hearth to window, rug to picture, clock to bookcase. "At school I often used to do that in imagination in bed at night, and always each familiar object had as it were a jolly smile for me. Now they just stared back at me. They didn't recognize me."

He described for Exceat how for the small boy in the stiff Sunday suit, fingering the collar and fumbling at the stiff black tie, the dumpy armchair ("‘Dumps’ was its name") stared upon from a threshold, was the chair into which, whenever the boy came into that room — his father sitting there, his mother there — always he would go into with a run and a bound, causing Dumps to do a run on its

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castors, when he would look over the arm to see how far it had gone this time towards the dragon at the end of the rug (the dragon with the green tongue) and then would look at his mother, who would be giving that droll little shake of her head, with "Sorry, Mum!," and then at his father, whose eyes would be raised in mock horror to the ceiling, with "Sorry, Dad!" . . . He would not dare, he felt, thus to run and bounce himself into Dumps now. Dumps did not remember him. Dumps, just dully staring at him ("Like a crocodile's eye from a swamp in my story-books") was different; everything was different.

That — in this room — was his father's study-table; but it wasn't, it was entirely changed. There was that appalling stain where on that appalling day he had upset the ink; but that too was not the same, had quite a different look, didn't remember him, just stared at him. . . . That — in here — was his mother's morning-room chair, her private chair, called "The Privateer"; but it wasn't. It just gave him a stony look. "The Privateer" never in all his life had looked at him like that. It didn't know him. A terrible thickness (he said) came into his throat. . . . He had to put up his hands to the frightful pain of it. . . .

This was his bedroom; but it wasn't. It was the same room yet an entirely different room, looking at him with a quite different face which did not recognize him, just as his headmaster at his prep. school had been the jolliest chap in an old tweed suit on the evening of his first arrival, and next had appeared before him, the same man but an entirely

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different, aloof and unfriendly man, in a surplice and hood in chapel next morning, staring straight at him where he sat but not recognizing him, appearing indeed not even to see him.

That was his bed; but it wasn't. It looked at him in a way that told him that when he got into it he would have to lie perfectly still in it; it would not be, as it had always been, either a tent or a boat or a cave or a corral. It used to become any of those things at its own jolly intention. He never knew what it had chosen to be until he got into it. It never could be anything like that now. It was quite, quite different.

Those were his boats on that shelf; that was his cowboy kit on that peg; those were his books in that case, arranged as Dad had taught him with the shortest in the middle of each row rising in exact gradation, never one out of place, to the tallest at each end. But they weren't his books, none of the things were his things. The boat sails used to sort of flap at him when he looked at them, the cowboy kit used to wriggle to get down to him, the books used to call out their titles to him. Now they all — sails, hulls, Stetson, revolver holster, books — all just mutely, motionlessly stared. They didn't know him. One book in that row was out of its place. It stuck up disorderly with a shorter book on each side. All his father's habits of order, quickening within him with each year he grew as all the parents' particular attributes will quicken in an only child, hedged by example, prompted him to go forward and adjust the book. He did



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not like to. Anything he touched would feel, as everything he saw looked, different. . . .

This was his parents' room; but it wasn't. It was a quite different room. That was his mother's bed; but it wasn't in the least. He had got into it a thousand times and snuggled down beside her, always on the first morning of the holidays, always on the last. But he could not imagine himself getting into that strange still stiff bed that now was there. That was Father's bed; but it wasn't. A lion used to roar from the jolly bed that used to be there when he went near it in the morning. Sometimes a buffalo used to leap roaring from it and chase him, hysterically shrieking, to the shelter of his mother's. ("Save me, Mum, save me!") No buffalo possibly could ever couch in — And again (he said) had come that frightful swelling suffocation in his throat, again his hands put up to hold the pain. All different. All dismissing him, shutting him out. The very smell that each room had — tobacco in this, flowers in that, furniture-polish in the other — was sensed to be the same remembered smell yet was savoured as a quite, quite different smell; not wanting to be smelled by him, pushing him away.

Something had gone out of the house. Something of which every brick and board and thread and air had been compounded had been withdrawn from the house; and all that it used to give him had gone with it.

"Gone," said Shand, "when that door slammed. Gone *with* the slam." He smiled. "Funny, eh?"

Exceat felt himself as it were turning a page of the book

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that he was in; realizing a development in the play he was watching; conceiving a new impulse in the relationship of father and son which he was attending. "What followed?" he said.

The boy had been taken (Shand told) to the home of his aunt and uncle and, as his aunt called her children, "My five." Uncle was a partner in a firm of City solicitors; they lived at Bromley and there, thenceforward, was the orphaned boy's home. "But you know it never was 'home' to me. They were all, uncle and aunt and the Five, kindness itself to me; on a visit I couldn't have been in a jollier household. But it wasn't 'home' as that small boy that I was then had known 'home'; and I never, from the very day of my arrival, could bring myself to use the word, just as one hears of stepchildren and of sons and daughters-in-law who can't use Father and Mother to new relationships. When other chaps at my prep. school spoke of 'Home' I used to say 'At my uncle's'; when I went on to my public-school with two of my cousins and spoke with them of the holidays I always used to say 'Your home'; 'When we get back to your home we'll do so and so'; and to other chaps or to friends at Bromley always it was 'My cousins' home.' *My* home, you see, was behind that slammed door. It always has been. It's stupid no doubt, but wherever I am and whatever company I'm in, always I have it at the back of my mind, brought right into the front of my mind if a door should slam, that I'm not really of the place or of the

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society; that I'm shut out." He smiled apologetically. "It's what the fashion calls, of course, a complex."

"Nothing like telling it," Exceat smiled, "to unravel it."

"You're sure you don't mind hearing?"

"I'm interested — profoundly."

Young Shand gave him grateful eyes. "Why I am unloading it all on you, I still can't imagine. It's this room, you know; something about this room that I've never, since at home before the slam, felt in another."

"I've an idea about that," said Exceat, "as I told you. You go on unwinding the complex. I'm psychoanalysing."

Shand laughed.

He went on then to tell of how schooldays ended with entry into his uncle's office with a view to becoming articled and joining the firm. The three boy cousins, having no inclination that way — "As God knows nor had I" — and naturally having first claims on the family budget, took professions involving university degrees. Shand, living still at Bromley, stuck out the law from feelings of dutiful, not to say affectionate, response for all that had been done for him, while strongly and more strongly tided within him the urge to make novelist his career. He wrote his first book while still in the office — "And that wasn't fair of course, my heart and all my thoughts given in one direction and my roof and my pocket-money and my keep coming to me from another. *And*, more and more the older I grew, the longing to be as near as I could get to a roof, to a home, of my own."

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His uncle, he said, was "extraordinarily decent to him." Very regretfully, with considerable misgiving but with kindest understanding, the uncle agreed with the longing to launch out, independent, on literature. Something short of one hundred pounds a year had been coming to the boy all this time from the investment of his parents' estate. With this as means of support young Shand had bade farewell to Bromley, taken a bed-sitting-room in South Kensington — and embarked.

"It was marvellous at first," he told Exceat. "I called it, using the word at last, Home. My first book, the one I had written at Bromley, was accepted by a publisher on the day I moved in and I took that as an omen and settled down, in my own home, to make my pen fairly fly. I visioned, you see, that first book doing wonders, and I grudged time for meals and exercise, surging myself over the second which would burst out, I imagined, into a market fairly throbbing for it. Oh, those were days, those were!"

The kindling passed. "Of course it proved to be," Shand said, "just a fool's paradise. The first book flopped completely, and I realized that money wasn't coming at me that way, perhaps not for years, and the thirty bob a week I had wasn't keeping me." As if here he felt himself argued that, starvation being the accepted handmaid of genius, thirty shillings a week should have kept him, he added, "Not keeping me, that's to say, so I could put by on it; and I wanted to put by; I had to." He paused. But Exceat, in a book, absorbed in its moods as they were presented to him and

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not arguing them, said nothing; and young Shand, seemingly relieved, went on. "So I started," he continued, "what I've been doing ever since — jobs; getting on with my writing in the time left to me."

He told of selling-on-commission jobs, hawking ladies' silk stockings from house to house; of envelope-addressing; of book and newspaper canvassing; of occasional holiday dry-nursing to small boys, of part-time secretarial jobs, concluding them with the "sort of secretarial job" held now in Quaile. "It's resident, and I think likely to continue, so it's quite the most useful thing I've struck so far and it's certainly the funniest; a Professor Unthank; have you ever heard of him?"

"Not that I can remember. What does he profess?"

"Economics. He's known apparently in his own circles, he's retired now, as Economy Unthank, the sort of name a crank would get, and he's the most unbelievably comic old crank you could imagine. He's preparing a monumental work — that's where I come in — on what he says is sociology. It's going to be in God knows how many volumes and called, what do you think, *The Anatomy of Bosh.*"

"Not really?"

"Absolutely. He thinks that all civilization's institutions, from religion downwards, are Bosh — you should hear him say the word! — and he's laying himself out with sufficient statistics and things to fill the British Museum — which I help him tabulate — to prove it."

Some amusing particulars young Shand gave. An amus-

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ing recital he had contrived to make of all his earlier make-shifts. But that there had been no amusement in the living of them, cankered at best by the handicaps they put upon his writing, was not to be concealed by the gay bravery with which he told them. Very painfully through it all echoed, slam on slam, the slammed door outside of which stood all that this young spirit had never known since first it slammed.

And that was the metaphor which Exceat took up when in due course his visitor took leave.

Conducting him outside, waving again his reiterated thanks for the friendship shown him, Exceat took him by the arm and turned him about to face the front-door. "You see that door?" he said. "You remember that I told you I was psychoanalysing while you unwound your slammed-door complex, and that I had an idea? Well, I'm going to do with that door a bit of psychoanalyst treatment of the complex. That door's the Open Door. Every time you think of the Slammed Door, and especially every time you hear one slam, think of that, the open one. I want you to come into it — no knocking — whenever you've got time and feel inclined, and I want you to go into that room you like so much and in which you feel you can write, and think of it as your own, and sit down at the table and get down to it. Agreed?"

Pressure of young Shand's hands — both of his hands — helped his stammered joy to show in what measure it was agreed.

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"I'm never in it in the daytime," Exceat added, "and if you get evening opportunity and urge to write and find me there I'll just look up and nod from whatever I'm pottering with and you'll just give a preoccupied grunt and take your seat."

Young Shand sought to cover a clear emotion with light words. "I shall burst into tears or something," he said, "if I try to say any more of what I feel," and he offered his hand again.

"Don't try then," said Exceat, elaborately refusing the hand, and Shand laughed happily and turned away. But in two steps turned back.

"I say," he said, and looked, Exceat thought, a shade embarrassed over whatever it was that he proposed to say, "I say; you've been so amazingly kind in letting me tell you all about myself — you can't imagine what a, a peep through the slammed door it's been to have someone to tell to — that somehow I feel I'd like you to know just one other thing about me." He stopped, hesitant, then went on. "When I told you that after the flop of my first book I started going for jobs instead of sticking out on my thirty bob a week because I wanted to put by, you didn't ask me why I wanted to."

Exceat gave a twist of a smile. "At your age in my generation," he said, "there'd have been no reason to. Every young man who was saving money was doing it for one and the same purpose."

"To marry?"

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"You could bet on it."

A tinge of colour showed on young Shand's cheek-bones. "It's done today as well," he said.

"Ah, you're engaged to be married," Exceat said; and, precisely as if he were father receiving such news from son, an affectionate epithet slipped to his tongue. "That's splendid, old man."

Shand showed a son's smile. "We've been engaged five years." The smile passed. His eyes moved about as though he quested words or debated use of them. "You wouldn't believe, would you," impulsively he then said, "that in these days, when according to all that's said and seen the old-fashioned stories of obstacles between a man and a girl who want to marry are old-fashioned to mockery — you wouldn't believe that still, and just as adamantly, there are obstacles?"

"Well, I scarcely would," agreed Exceat, "and that's a fact. I certainly had the notion that all the classic obstacles, parental disapproval and different stations in life and all that, were scrapped with the Ten Commandments. Even the money question doesn't seem to — But you've sense enough obviously not to marry on thirty bob a week, so I suppose that's your —"

"Yes, that's our obstacle," young Shand took him up; "but not in the sense you're meaning. It's my obstacle, not hers. She's got an income, or will have on her marriage, sufficient for both; and that's what I meant when I spoke of old-fashioned objections. Do you understand?"



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Exceat puckered brows over the position. "Let's get it clear. She's got the money and you're making the obstacle. Do you mean that, though she is willing, you won't marry and live on her, as the saying is?"

Shand nodded. "That's what I mean."

"You're not asking me my opinion, are you?"

Young Shand said stoutly, "I don't want anyone's opinion. I know what seems right to me and no opinion affects it either way. But it's a heavy thing to carry about with one, it's a slamming of the door again, and till today I've never had a soul I felt I could tell it to. Now I'm going."

Exceat, his heart much out to him, went with him a few steps. "Yes, but remember the open door you're leaving behind you. Not only open for your work, Shand, but for us to debate this obstacle to your marriage business sometimes if you should care to. Because there's room for debate, mind you. I'm old-fashioned enough to be with you in a man not living on his wife; but you'll be pulling your own weight soon and reasonably perhaps might consent to share from a wife for a year or two; and added to that there is, perhaps, her view to consider. Quite possibly she might feel it unfair on her that she can't marry you merely because you won't pocket your principles."

Young Shand said, "You're right. That's what she does feel."

## Chapter V

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IT WAS while on his bicycle, watching 500's registration by the cyclometer, that Exceat had met Clive Shand. Clocking up first miles towards his next century, he was on the Wizard again on the following afternoon when he had his second meeting with Jo Pryde.

In a sequestered by-road at the time, unexpected rain-drops had raped him from a musing in which he had been lost to threats gathering in the sky. He was in for a proper wetting, he saw; and, sun-deceived ass that he had been, deliberately he had not bothered to bring with him the splendid waterproof cape with the thumb-holes which not yet, much wishing an opportunity, had he had occasion to use.

These were vexatious realizations and he had therefore no more genial thoughts for the sounds now behind him, first of a car, then of its strident hooting, than commonly the cyclist gives to aggressive demand of gangway by the motorist.

Grumpily, he edged to his near side, giving ample room for the nuisance but not, as it appeared, sufficient to satisfy the driver.

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*Krek — krek — krek — krek — krek*; the ceaseless tapping on the disc of an impatient hand; the sound almost on top of him.

"Come on the., can't you," Exceat muttered, vehemently signalling advance, raindrops stinging now his face.

*Krek — krek — krek — krek — kr — ek.*

The radiator of the infernal thing crawled into the tail of his eye. *Krek — krek — krek.*

"What the devil?" he exclaimed; and looked angrily over his shoulder; and was looking, he found, through the car's windscreen at the laughing face of Jo Pryde vivid behind it.

Last night, laughing precisely thus, in her vivid fairness dazzling precisely thus, she had been seen by him in a dream.

Wednesday had been their meeting at Craddock's Circulating Library, and on Wednesday night he had dreamt of Jack, most oddly turned from gipsy hue to dazzling fair. Lying awake and meditating the oddness of it, he had realized well whose dazzle it was that she had worn.

Thursday, the next day, had been his visit by Clive Shand. *Full Fathom Five*, inscribed, "Piers Exceat — Who Opened a Door for Clive Shand," had been brought over to him that evening. With an intent appreciation he had read it till late, then taken it to bed with him and, deeply engrossed, greatly admiring, read till after one o'clock. If, when at length he turned to sleep, his subconscious mind was to stir

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itself in form of dreams, it was of the book or of its author that reasonably the dreams should have been.

But in the event it was not so.

His sole remembered dream when he awoke was of a projection of Jo Pryde before his view. She had not spoken, she was playing no part, she was in no place that he recognized. She merely and for mere moments stood before him, dazzling in her vivid fairness, more dazzling yet in the laughing smiles she gave him.

Then in a dream; and he had thought about it since, and had thought also "Twice dreamt of in two nights." Now in actual appearance, and it was with a start of highest pleasure that he recognized her; and his start (examining himself afterwards, he realized) was the leap within himself of a hidden, an unadmitted, hope that soon he would re-encounter her again.

Her near window was lowered and, coming alongside him, with characteristic informality of opening, "I say," she called, "pretty good my recognizing you from behind considering I'd only seen you once for about two minutes, wasn't it?"

"Ah, you've obviously," he chaffed her, "been thinking about me since."

She nodded, gleaming. "I have, as a matter of fact. I'll tell you."

He had put his right hand on the window-frame, and she brought the car to rest. "You'd better come in here out of the rain," she said. "It's coming down like blue cats before

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it's finished, by the look of it. Shove your bike in the hedge, eh?" She leant across and looked downwards. "I say, it's a wizard fine bike, isn't it?"

He dismounted. "It *is* a Wizard. That's its name; I've only had it a month."

She reached over to the back seat and pulled a white thin mackintosh towards him. "Here, stick this over to keep the saddle dry."

Absurdly, the silky touch of the thing and the mildly pleasant smell it had about it forbade him its use for such purpose.

"Rot," he said, "tearing it on the brambles."

"Rot to you," countered she; and while he put the bicycle in the hedge, "Don't take it then; get rheumatism and I'll have booked a patient. It all helps."

He was going to question her meaning but when he turned to her she was holding open the door for him and he said, "Thanks"; and she, "I'll just pull in out of the way and then we can have a jolly snug chatter. Hook up your window, will you?"; and his interest was taken by the comfortable appointments of the car, a roomy Daimler.

"Jolly nice car," he said. "Is it your own?"

She closed up her own window against the rain, now sharply driving. "No, my boss's."

"Your boss's?"

She set her back against her door and faced him comfortably.

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"Why, yes, I'm the hired serf of Doctor Aubyn. I thought everyone knew that."

"I didn't even know there was a Doctor Aubyn, much less that he had a hired serf; though I understand now what you meant about booking another patient. What else does a doctor's hired serf do?"

She laughed at his employment of her term. "I forgot how new you were down here. The serf dispenses his medicines, keeps his accounts, drives his car, washes his bottles — and all that."

"The serf's a pretty useful creature. You're a qualified dispenser, are you?"

"Oh, yes. I'm going for my M.P.S. certificate in time — if need be," and with the addition he thought that, surprisingly, she seemed to sigh.

But if she had in fact expressed suggestion of weariness at a prospect ahead of her, immediately she covered it. "But I," she said brightly, "was going to do the questioning, not you. I told you I'd been thinking of you since we bagged the same book at the library. It was your name I've been thinking about."

"Ah, dash," he said with mock chagrin. "I hoped it was my handsome if time-worn face."

She leaned back her head to rest against the window-frame and with wide steady eyes regarded him, not speaking. A third party, not knowing the relations between the pair, might have had the absurd idea that it was indeed Exceat's face she had carried in mind and that now, seeing

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it again, she studied it to verify impression received of it. Exceat, a sensation which he could not possibly have defined within his breast, thought only that her look was charged, but was for him inscrutable, and that her eyes were an amazing blue.

She raised her head and was smiling again. "No, it was your name," she smiled. "I wondered if I had got it aright. Was it 'Exeat' did you tell me?"

She pronounced the name with its *c* omitted, but people frequently pronounced it thus, and he nodded agreement. "Yes," he said, "Exceat, that's right. Any objection to it?"

"None at all; I rather like it. But it sounds to me, and that's why I thought that perhaps I'd got it wrong, rather a funny word for a name. Isn't an *exeat* some sort of a chit that they give a chap at Cambridge when he wants a night out on the tiles?"

"Not if they knew he wanted it in order to go on the tiles. If to see his sick father or to bury his aunt or some such, yes, an *exeat*. Matter of fact my name's not that exactly; mine's got a *c* in it." And he spelt it for her.

She was amused. "I felt there was a catch in it somewhere. I rather like it with a *c*, I'm bound to say; but it's near enough to the other anyway. When it's without the *c*, for burying aunts, what does it mean exactly?"

"For burying aunts," he told her, smiling, "it means, exactly, in the Latin, 'Let him go out.'"

Immediately her attention appeared to wander. Moving her eyes from him she lifted them towards the sweeping

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rain, regarded it a moment, then, and this time quite unmistakably, sighed.

The sombre prospect from the windscreen, clouds low above a puddling road that briefly lost itself in mist, would have justified perhaps a sigh from nature gloomily disposed. From personality so animate as this vivid creature's the dolorous sound invited chaff, as incongruity always will, and Exceat had conventional banter on his tongue. But looking at her he caught upon her eyes a shadowing as if, with her sigh, the passage of some woe across her mind had cast its shade in passing. He used the phrase his tongue had ready but he spoke it without mock, soberly.

"Why the sigh?" he spoke.

She turned him a child's face, artless in the simplicity of its delivery of howsoever surprising a confidence. "I know a man," she said, "for whom I wish to God that whoever manages these things would pronounce that *exceat* — 'Let him go out.' "

And at that, for a briefest instant of time they looked one upon the other; mutely but with their thoughts, mankind's antennæ, feeling each towards the other's through those dense webs of artificiality in which the human soul, dreading exposure, has learnt to hide its nakedness.

Hers: "*What does he think of me for this that, scarcely knowing him, I have said; and wherefore dare I not say more?*"

His: "*Why has this lovely fledgling told me this; and wherefore dare I not ask further?*"



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A briefest interval, and yet an interval enormously protracted, had been thus portentously occupied. To thought's processes a space in which a lifetime might be traversed, to their outward perception of time it was no more than instantaneous; and with an adroitness equalling the deliberation with which she had caused the situation, with diction as free as the words it cancelled had been weighted, immediately she dissipated it.

"That's where I dropped a brick," she cried. "I oughtn't to have said that."

Relieved, gladly taking her note, "Why ever not?" he laughed. "Why I myself, as it happens, also know a man for whom 'Let him go out' would be the very prayer."

By natural suggestion the Slammed Door had come into his mind and he was about to name Clive Shand as his case in point when "Do you?" she exclaimed, "Do you know a man fixed like that?" and that he might enjoy continuance of her vivacity he substituted a personal illustration.

"Certainly I do; and better than that, showing how common the situation is, I can give you a case where 'Let him go out' has actually been pronounced to a man—who went, forthwith." He tapped a finger on his chest. "To me."

"To you?" Her amused wonder, that of a child promised a surprise, was delicious to him to watch.

He tapped himself again, nodding. "To me. Naphtali. Do you know that context, what Naphtali was?"

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Her eyes sparkled at the fun. "‘A hind let loose,’" she quoted.

He laughed his pleasure in her quickness. "Good girl! Yes, just as you're a serf in chains, so I'm a slave made free. That's how I've come down here to Island House."

She positively was shining. "I say, but this is fun! Made free from what bondage?"

He made with his right hand the motion of writing. "Books."

"Oh, you're an author! But how exciting."

"That depends," said Exceat, exchanging his facetiousness for a deliberate dryness, "on what kind of books excite you. I doubt mine would."

"Well, yours won't be novels, I expect," she guessed, "or probably I should have known your name."

"You certainly would, if only by weight of number. Open that window for a gulp of fresh air in case the shock makes you faint and I'll tell you how many books — yes, not novels — I've written."

She gave a little spirt of mirth and put her hand to the window catch. "We can give ourselves less fug anyway," she declared; "the rain's stopping"; and she wound down the glass. "Now then; I've gulped in advance. Tell me."

He spaced his words to give them peak effect. "One — hundred — and — eleven."

She put her hand to her heart and with shut eyes went back in mock seizure. Recovering, "You never have?" she cried.

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Immensely enjoying himself, "I absolutely have," he affirmed.

"But whatever sort?"

He had no wish to spoil the fun by bringing it to stupid facts. He waved dismissal of the thing. "Oh, just tripe. Does a hind let loose want to recall the rattle of his chains, do you suppose? Forget it, as they say in Hollywood. Look, tell me instead —"

She wrinkled her nose at him. "Hollywood to you — tell nothing. What rot to say 'just tripe.' No one could possibly write a hundred and eleven — yards, eh? — of tripe."

"Couldn't they! I'll send you a sample yard and you shall judge for yourself."

"Well, I'll gum you to that," she cried, "anyway. That's a promise, remember. And come now, tell me what sort of books. Of course you must."

He shed the quizzing from his face and changed his tone. "Quite seriously, just what we call hack-work has been my job — guide- and travel-books and *The Story of Our Life-boats* and all that catch-penny sort of stuff. Who do you suppose produces all the stacks of random books you see on a bookstall, or all the boots in a boot-shop window? Why, diligent, necessary jobbers of whom I'm one, or rather, thank God, used to be one."

He stopped and waited her rejoinder, but for a little space she made none. Again, as at that early point of their talk, she had leaned back her head and with wide steady

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eyes was regarding him. Again a third party, unknowing the brevity of their acquaintanceship, might have thought that her interest in him was of long standing and that she studied him now to verify impression of him previously registered. And, observing her regard, again Exceat — again within his breast a sensation which he could not possibly have defined — thought only of her look that it was charged but was for him inscrutable and that her eyes were an amazing blue.

Judiciously, as though pronouncing a verdict on what she had examined, "Well, your modesty suits you," she said, "I'll say that for you."

With twist of her shoulders, as though doffing her judicial robes, casting away a mood, she sat up and resumed her normal vivacity of speech. "Not that I believe a word of it. I'll let it go, however, and —"

"That's good," he interrupted; "and now you can tell me what I was going to ask you when you insisted, instead, that you wanted tripe."

"I still want the tripe," she declared. "I'll give way though — what was it?"

He told her that it was of her boy's name Jo that he was curious to hear more. Of what name was it the diminutive; or was it a nickname?

They had a laugh together first. Just as she had thought of his name without its *c*, so he, they found, had been thinking of her Jo with an *e* added and of her Pryde with *i* for its *y*; and that amused them.

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"Jocelyn," she then told him.

His reflection was that Jocelyn was perfect for her, Jocelyn and Pryde a symphonic beauty worthy to be caught together in the beauty that was hers. But his thought also was that, while the Jo vividly was her vivid self as normally she presented it, the Jocelyn was her face in repose — and was more. It was associated, he somehow felt, with that indefinable feeling which twice now he had experienced within himself when he had seen her thoughtfully regarding him.

And because of that feeling, skirting as it might have been a thicket in which something unknown has stirred, he deliberately withheld comment on her answer.

"I think Jo suits you," he said.

"Folks do," she agreed. She had watched him while he paused but if she had expected that he would give some opinion on the Jocelyn she took no notice of his omission to do so. "I've always been, they'll tell you about here," she went on, "the Jo sort — you know, the pop-in, pop-out, never where you're wanted and never wanted much anywhere, sort; straw in mouth, hands in pockets and ready to sit wherever there's a vacant place. That sort."

He laughed. "It's a good description of a Jo; but I don't see you in it."

"Oh, rather I am. You ask 'em."

"Ask whom; this doctor of yours? I'd have thought from all you do for him —"

"Well, he might give me a mark or two, but he'd tell

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it of me nonetheless. But I meant really any of the families up and down the place. I've lived here in Quaile off and on pretty well all my life, you know."

He was somehow surprised. From her "hired serf" expression and, much more though less reasonably, from her aloofness from the common run by the rare quality of her beauty, he somehow had thought of her as dropped down here remote from any ties much as that lovely hand of hers had dropped, with no visible connection, upon that book that day. As being detached he somehow had imagined her, using the word in a consonance with 'sole,' 'unique'; and in its conventional use he gave it to her now, expressive of his surprise. "I had thought you somehow quite detached down here," he said.

She laughed. "Oh, I'm detached all right; always have been — in my family I mean; and there's, as I described it for you, the Jo sort again. Matter of fact and without pulling any sob stuff I've been a sort of Cinderella all my time. You wouldn't think it, would you?"

He said judicially, "I certainly would not."

She laughed again. "Well, facts are facts. I've had a stepmother and two stepsisters since I was four and that's the absolute Cinderella fit-up, isn't it?"

"But not necessarily the conditions."

Again, head leaning back, she looked at him; debating him, he this time thought; but when now she recovered her position she cast aside more, apparently, than her judgments only, for she made as if to dismiss the court.

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Lowering her window to its full, "I say," she cried, "the rain's gone over; here's the sun, bless its heart. About time for me to be moving on, I'm thinking."

It was a thought, if she had it, that Exceat was far from sharing. "Are you on an errand?" he asked.

"No, just a scoot round. This is my boss's weekly golf afternoon and he lets me buzz the car about if I've the wish to."

"Well, what's the hurry then? I've been rather enjoying this; haven't you?"

As one stating a plain fact, without indeed so little as a smile to dissemble it, "Yes, I have," she said. "I like talking to you."

He returned her her own sincerity. "I like hearing you talk. Tell me this Cinderella business."

She put her head to one side, the rather fascinating gesture (he thought) of a bird attracted by a crumb but dubious of approach.

"Well, I believe I will," she then smiled. "It's funny that I should, scarcely knowing you; but do you know this, that, at my age at all events, there are faces you see sometimes that you feel you'd like awfully to tell things to. You don't often know such people — I never have — but you see them, in the street, in a bus, at a theatre, anywhere, and you feel — Do you know that?"

He nodded. "It's been sung," he said. "Ships that pass in the night —"

She took him up keenly. "'And hail each other in pass-

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ing.' That's right. That's it. I love that thing. Well, it's funny that I've got that feeling about you. *Do* people tell you things?"

He thought of Clive Shand. He thought also of a reputation he had had in his set of being a listener, not a talker. "There have been occasions," he said.

She cocked her head again. "There'll be one now," she told him.

She told him that up to six or seven years ago, when her father died, her home used to be down here, at Quaile Park, "a whacking place, rather dear, I loved it." The father, who used it from London as a country house, was represented to Exceat as a man of considerable financial interests, a speculator, who "one day was rolling and the next stony." It was in one of the rolling periods presumably that, following the death of Jo's mother, he married his second wife, a widow with twin girls, for it was then that he bought Quaile Park, the lady preferring country de luxe to town and making Quaile her home. He died while in, quite certainly, a stony period. Quaile Park was sold. Jo Pryde's stepmother, with her twins and Jo, went to live at Chislehurst.

This, so to speak, was the outline sketch of the story Exceat heard, and it was filled in for him then about the picture of Jo Pryde, as child, as girl, as young woman, profoundly attached during his lifetime to her father, increasingly edged out from the trinity that was her stepmother and the twins. Kate and Fanny Trinkett had been



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children of eight years old when Jo Pryde, then four, first was told to call them her sisters.

"There's an age of differences between four and eight," she said, "especially when the eights not only are two as against one but are twins. What I can remember of those days, we never even began to click, I and they; and looking back I can see that it was almost impossible that we should. My father, after a bit, was only in the house on as it were visits. The twins had had their mother all their lives and they'd have resented me, I expect, butting in on her even so little as I was inclined to, which was mighty little, for I remember distinctly that I never could understand who she was, suddenly coming to live in the place, let alone be attracted to her. So I was out of it, you see, from the start; and when my father died and we went to an altogether different kind of house at Chislehurst, I simply wasn't in the picture at all.

"They weren't," she explained, "either my stepmother or the twins, in any sense definitely unkind to me; not in the least. It simply was that they were three-in-one and I was one on my own. They had tricks of affection, habits of daily life, private jokes and words, which I couldn't begin to imitate and wasn't wanted to imitate. Often it was like living with a foreign family whose language you can't speak and whose customs are entirely different."

This period, beginning with the move to Chislehurst, had begun, Exceat gathered, when the four years between her and the twins stood for the enormous gulf which lies be-

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tween the schoolgirl of sixteen and the young woman of twenty. Jo Pryde at a boarding-school, Fanny and Kitty always at home; how out of it the former was, how definitely inconvenient during the holidays, was easy to imagine. When arrived in time her own turn to leave school, she became permanent inmate, and incubus, of a household in which by now had strongly developed what Exceat, when Jo Pryde told of it, thought uncommonly well put.

"I was up against," she said, "two pretty fierce complexes, a twin complex and a mother complex. The twins were twin in a degree that would have made them sufficient to each other whether they lived permanently in a crowd or on a desert island, and they had towards their mother a mother-complex — or should it be daughter-complex? — that made it, literally, impossible for them to be as little as a week-end away from her. Jolly estimable and delightful and all that, no doubt; but not, not healthy or natural I think in the degree to which they carried it and to which their mother played upon it. They actively disliked men; the idea of marriage was quite horrible to them; they were married to their mother."

And Jo Pryde, Exceat could see, experienced no opposition to her proposal, when one day she made it, that she should "push off" and earn her own living.

She chose pharmacy and took also a secretarial course, going daily to town for her studies.

"So now you know," she dazzled at him when she had

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brought her story to her post obtained with Dr. Aubyn, old friend of the Quaile Park days, "what it lets you in for to have a face that one feels one could tell things to."

"I'll start advertising it, I think," he smiled back at her, "if it's likely to get me stories as interesting as yours."

"Ah, stories," she took him up. "You're an author, I'd forgotten. If I want to kick myself afterwards, as I probably shall, for bleating all that to you I shall excuse myself by remembering that to an author — well, naturally, he's always glad to hear other people's experiences, isn't he?"

"If it's going to stop you kicking yourself," said Exceat, "you can put it like that and welcome. Though I've told you, mind," he went on, "that I'm not an author, I'm a book-jobber."

She flicked airy fingers. "Oh, that!" she cried disdainfully; but in the same moment he saw a new interest occupy her eyes and she said keenly, "I say, by the way, you know a lot of authors, I expect, don't you?"

"I know a few. I met one, matter of fact, only yesterday."

"Here?" Interestedly she leant forward. "Down here in Quaile?"

The alertness of her voice surprised him. He was given the sense of having aroused eagerness in a child by offer of a treat and, playing the part, he nodded portentous nods.

"At my very gates," he said, "and took him in and gave him lunch. Clive Shand by name. Have you ever — ?"

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But her face, suffused with rush of colour, had answered him without completion of his question.

But for the nature of her affirmative, when she voiced it, he was wholly unprepared.

"I'm engaged to him," she said.

## Chapter VI

---

AT A DATE not greatly later, Exceat, recalling this conversation in the car, examining (in a new light) his reactions during it, was to find himself surprised, indeed in wonder, at the wholehearted sincerity of his pleasure in Jo Pryde's announcement. "I declare," he was to avow to himself, "that when she told me that her love was given to this boy I heard it with every year of my age over hers, with every particle of the divide between a life which has had its day and a life on the threshold of life. Good God, how could I have? But I did."

And unquestionably he had.

"You are?" he cried. "Engaged to him? You tell me that? By Jove I am delighted. We had an immense long talk together yesterday, that young man and I, and I've taken an uncommon fancy to him, uncommon."

Her pleasure was delicious to witness. "Had you known him before?"

"No, it was our first meeting and I feel now that I've known him years. He took a great liking to Island House, especially to my workroom, and I've given him the run of it to come and write in."

She clapped her hands together. A room that he took a

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fancy to, that appealed to him, was the one thing Clive had wanted, she said, ever since she had known him. If indeed he had taken to this in Exceat's house, and if indeed Exceat was putting it at his disposal, why Exceat could not begin to imagine the difference it would make to Clive's life.

And she became on this new theme, so near to her heart, newly communicative. She told him that she had known Clive Shand for years, first meeting him at the house of a mutual friend when he was living at Bromley, she at Chislehurst, and that it was through her, so that they might have opportunity of seeing one another, that recently he had obtained this post with Professor Unthank. She listened overjoyed when Exceat, prefacing his remarks by claiming for himself, though mere book-jobber by trade, high parts as book-discerner, spoke in highest terms of *Full Fathom Five*, confidently predicting the making of "a great, a very great name for himself" by "this young man of yours." She was in all her expression of what she told and what she heard deliciously pleased as she had been when first he had announced that he had met and had much approved her betrothed; yet there grew upon Exceat as he listened to and watched her the feeling that her happiness in this matter was, somehow, happiness for one detached from her, not happiness shared with that one; that her fond interest in Clive was an interest bestowed, not a mutuality of concern.

By what parallel to illustrate to himself what it was that,

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puzzling at it, he seemed thus to detect, he could not determine. He thought of offerings brought to a sick person who, having been given them, haply having been cheered by them, must be left to his illness and to his nurses. He thought of gifts brought to one sailing on a long voyage whom presently the ship must bear away. Somewhere within such forms of separation — this vivid creature the visitor forlornly leaving the sickroom, the desolated figure left upon the quay — lay the detachment which here he seemed to apprehend; and then suddenly, illuminating, nay substantiating what he felt, he remembered previous matters constructive of a rift within this lute. He remembered Clive Shand's telling of an obstacle in the path of his engagement to be married. He remembered the young man's "You're right; she does" when he had suggested that possibly the girl might feel his scruples in regard to her money to be unfair on her. And he remembered then, here in this car not twenty minutes ago, this lovely creature's sigh, first when she had prospected the need of progressing in her profession, again when she had "wished to God" that "*exeat*" might be pronounced upon a man she knew.

She was chilled, it came to him, this child, by waiting; she was weary, he conjectured, this young thing, of a delay that was imposed on her. And Exceat said, her theme and his contributions to it drawn to close, "Tell me one thing, will you, I wonder? Clive Shand spoke to me of his longing to be in a position to marry someone to whom he was engaged — you, of course, as I know now — and of how

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he was saving every penny and praying over each new book the quicker to bring it about. But he gave me to understand, or did I misunderstand? that she, as the saying is, had money."

There had come into her look while he spoke a certain apprehension as of one watching a search among documents for one which, found, will substantiate a charge. She nodded gravely. "Yes, that's right; that is so."

He had noticed her look. He liked not to see her troubled. "But — hired serf?" he smiled helpfully. "That doesn't seem to fit. I mean to say, if moneyed why then hired? If you have means of your own, how comes it that — ?"

"Why, means of my own," she took him up, "when I marry, not before, not now. It's a settlement, don't they call it, from my father's estate on my marriage?"

"Ah, of course," he exclaimed, "that was what Shand said, an income of her own, this girl to whom he was engaged, when she married." He looked at her speculatively. He showed her then a twist of a smile in order that he might make obvious, and therefore not impertinent, the question which, though to a point he already knew the answer, now he put.

"Then why not marry?" he said.

For a small space she held his eyes with hers before she answered. Her regard was not the same as that regard which, causing him that indefinable sensation within his breast, twice previously she had directed upon him, yet it was mated with that regard. It was the look of one estimat-



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ing him but estimating also considerations in which he had no part.

She said then, and his hearing as it were jumped at the repetition, exactly, of words which had been addressed to him but the day before, "You wouldn't believe, would you, that in these days, when my generation is supposed to do just what it likes, a man and a girl can be prevented from marrying just as hopelessly as when they had to elope to Gretna Green to do it?"

Exceat wanted to smile; he wanted, much more, and arising somehow out of a sudden recrudescence of that odd feeling which twice she had caused in him, to help her. He said soberly, "I was told it as a matter of fact only yesterday."

Her eyes lit. "Ah, by Clive?"

"Yes, by Shand, speaking of course, as you are, of yourselves."

She dropped her lids. A certain weariness was the implication of the gesture, and her voice when she spoke had a tired note, he thought. "Clive would have told you of it, I expect, only as he sees it as between himself and me," she said. "But it goes deeper than that — the preventing of a marriage, I mean."

She told him — easily able to do so because she had already told him so much — that her father's will had devised his estate on trust to her stepmother, his daughter and his two stepdaughters, each child to take a fourth part on marriage. A yield of £2000 annually had been the trust thus left;

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Jo Pryde's stepmother would thus find her income of this sum diminished by £500 a year on the marriage of Fanny, of Kitty, or of Jo; "And you wouldn't believe," she told Exceat, "no one would, the pressure that the trinity have been able to put on me to prevent my marrying unless" — she smiled — "some belted earl or some such, someone sufficiently wealthy to make it unnecessary for me to wish to take my settlement, should come along and ask me."

She presented the trinity — and, twin-complexed, mother-complexed, very clearly they were seen by Exceat — as representing to her that to snatch away a quarter of the Chislehurst income would be an offense impious, unnatural, selfish, cruel, wicked to a degree. Her £500 was shown to her in the family budget as standing for the upkeep of the mother's car and chauffeur. When arose the panic that Jo projected betrothal to penniless Clive Shand — "Then poor darling mother is to lose her car!" — was gasped in stricken concern. "Oh, Jo, you couldn't, you couldn't!"

"And put in that light," she told Exceat, "I felt, you know, at first that indeed I couldn't. My stepmother was crippled most of her time with neuritis and depended entirely on the car for her exercise. She had brought me up and in her way had always been kind to me. To deprive her of a quarter of her income did seem to me then, which was when Clive and I first knew what we meant to one another, a selfishly ungrateful thing to do to her and to the home, which after all *was* my home, in general; and with the whole atmosphere that was crowded on to me, and which

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I had been under all my life, I felt I simply could not take out my £500 a year, and for a time I never mentioned to Clive that when I married I should have it."

She gave a pale smile at Exceat and added, "I was counting then, as was poor Clive, on a quick success with his books and on an adorable cottage life with him soon after the first was published"; and she gave the flutter of a sigh and told then of the change in her attitude when, leaving the Chislehurst life to take up her first professional post ("With a little chemist at Brighton"), she left also the atmosphere of the trinity and its domination. "I began to see then what all the younger people today see, that my life was my own and that where selfishness entered anywhere into the matter it was on the part of mothers who directly or indirectly, by authority or by emotionalism, prevented their children from enjoying the independence that is theirs by right."

"That's from a book," the surface of Exceat's mind smiled to itself, "or from a lecture platform"; but as here exemplified he felt himself in profoundest sympathy with it.

"I asked myself," she was continuing, "why *my* £500 a year for the car more than Kitty's £500 or Fanny's? Why leave my share in the common fund when I no longer drew from the fund? Things like that I asked myself, until I was a bit ill, I think, with the worrying over it on top of what had been the bitter acceptance of it, bitter I mean as preventing me from sharing what was mine with Clive, from using it to join our lives as we longed for them to be

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joined. And then one night, the happiest night of my life, I could not sleep for excitement, I decided to throw all my scruples overboard; and my little chemist gave me a holiday; and I rushed up to London to Clive and told him what I had been keeping from him about my money and that we could be married there and then, at once."

She stopped. He saw her lids blink tightly down upon her eyes. She said in a small voice, "Well, he wouldn't."

Exceat could see that scene. He saw this lovely creature scarcely able to contain herself for joy as she came up from Brighton. He followed her, radiant, agog, across London to the South Kensington bed-sitting-room. He saw her bursting in, breathless, gleaming, ecstatic. He heard her rapt young voice: "Clive, oh, Clive, a miracle! Hold tight while I tell you! We can marry, we can marry!"

He imagined the tumbling words in which then she would have poured her secret out upon her lover; and in imagination he saw then the look that would slowly have grown upon the face of that pale young man; in imagination heard a faltering utterance replace the transports of her speech: "But what's the matter, Clive? Clive, why do you look at me like that?"; and later, when young Shand would have told her of his feelings in the matter, "Oh, Clive, Clive, Clive!"

And he thought it, imagining it thus, reading it again in the wistful and exquisite face before him; a most piteous spectacle. And he thought her plight, first restrained from consummation of her desires by domination of the trinity;

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next dashed from heaven to earth by her lover's rejection of her joy; now month upon month, year passing into year, shut of her happiness by his refusal to make her happy — he thought that this was truly an affair most lamentable to be.

She added to her "Well, he wouldn't" brief words of explanation why he would not. The reason was already known to Exceat. Her telling of it was eased and accelerated by the "I know" and the "Yes, he told me that" which he was able to interpolate. And she asked him then the question which he knew would come and which he feared.

"What do you think of his ideas?" she asked.

He moved uncomfortably in his seat. "It's a man's view," he said; "and I'm a man. Naturally I can see it."

She looked up the road, saying nothing.

"Those are his principles," Exceat said. "They're costing him, you know that, don't you? all that they're costing you."

Still with her eyes averted she shook her head. "No," she said, "not in the same degree because his principles, whatever they cost him, in themselves support him. I haven't anything to support me."

It was Exceat's time to look up the road, to be silent.

She turned towards him. "And as to principles," she said. "Should a man put his principles before his love?"

"It's been done," he said gravely. "It was done by Lovelace when he wrote, do you remember, to Lucasta?"

She gave him sombre eyes. "Lovelace had his war," she

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said; "she only had the waiting. That's what a man forgets."

On an impulse Exceat leant forward and put a hand on one of hers, forlornly on her lap. "We've got to know each other very well, I think," he said, "and I'm old enough to be your father. I want you to know this — that when Shand told me his side of what you have just told me I told him that I thought your view was to be considered and that when he came up to work in my room we'd discuss it sometimes. I know which way I'm going to urge him now, and you can guess it, can't you?"

There answered him if it was answer, no other but a movement of the hand beneath his hand. A pulse, a tremble, it was no more than that, it threw up from some infinitely remote cell of his life the memory, when a boy, of holding his hand upon a stricken bird, tears in his eyes, and of rejoicing then to feel, infinitely slight, the tremble of its heart.

But the tears now stood, as he looked upon her profile, welled up beneath her lower lid; and "I'm going now," he said, and disengaged his hand, and opening his door stepped out into the road.

"There's a cloth in the pocket of that door," her voice came. "Your bike saddle's soaking probably. You must dry it."

Her tone had a muffled sound. He did not look around. "Bright idea," he said cheerfully and reaching back took out the cloth.

Over the wiping down of the Wizard he took more time than was required. When he thought that sufficient for

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her to recover herself had elapsed he turned back with the cloth, caught the white of a handkerchief being pushed down beside her, but saw with relief that she was smiling.

"Fine," he said, "thanks awfully," and replaced the cloth and closed the door.

Briskly she switched her engine, pressed her starter and engaged a gear. "Well, I think that's been jolly nice, that talk we've had," she answered, defiant almost in her gay resumption of normal tone and air.

"I think it's been delightful," he said, and stood away; and she released her clutch and nodded brightly to him. "And, here," he cried, "half a minute; one thing more."

The car had begun to move. She stopped it and dazzled towards him. "Yes?"

"One thing more to help what I've undertaken to do. You probably don't find it too easy to meet, you two, do you?"

The "Bags I" phraseologist of the library again, "Fouilly hard," she declared. "I can't have him to the doctor's nor he me to old Unthank's. We 'walk out' together. It's loathly."

"You'll now walk in," Exceat smiled, "instead. I've told you I've given him the run of my workroom; well, now the use of it is yours as well. I'm alone up there at Island House, you know, and never likely to be near that room when he'll be using it; and whenever your visit to meet him there should be teatime-ish there'll be tea. I'll tell him I've told you, and you'll tell him, and you'll do it, won't you?"

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To her tone and to her look he believed that again he saw her summon defiance. She put her face nearer to his as though to confide a secret. "If you want to know what I think of you," she said engagingly, "it's what the American women say of the London police — too wonderful."

"Oh, everybody says that of me, lady," he mocked.

But badinage was not the suggestion of his look while, standing there, he watched the car from sight.



PART THREE

He Is Dismayed



# Chapter I

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THE FREEDOM of the workroom of Island House, in effect the freedom of all the demesne, residence and grounds, granted by Exceat to Clive Shand and through him to Jo Pryde, became as time went on a usage established. Clive walked in and out as he pleased; Jo, though more seldom, similarly.

Clive's afternoons were his own. Morning and evening he assisted Professor Economy Unthank in compilation of the monumental *Anatomy of Bosh*; some portion of the hours in between almost daily he would give to his fourth novel — *Magic Casements* as it was to be called — in the room which, immediately on his first entry of it, had ministered to his senses as perhaps only to the creative spirit will environment minister, and beneath the roof which, sole among all he had known since the slamming of that door, had arched about him the feeling of Home.

He had his own table in the workroom, the one at the windows looking up the grounds. This was that veritable refectory-table desire for which had taken Exceat into Mr. Battiscombe's antique furniture premises. "But this is yours, the one you use, I'm sure," Clive had cried, when, offered his choice between it and the other, he had chosen

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this and, doing so, had caught a flicker across Exceat's eyes. "Young Hedgerow," said Exceat, taking him affectionately by the elbow, "that table is just crying for creative work to be done at it, any writing man would see that. If I footled at it with my stamp-collection, or even tried out at it the feeble pen I hope to find down here one day, and if it saw a Hedgerow man creating at the other, it would develop a splinter under my hand where some old monk had spilt a secret poison and do me in before Charles could fetch a doctor. I'm taking no such chances. That table's *yours*."

And with the knowledge that a writer can no more suffer his table than his pen to be used in his absence by another, Exceat removed there and then all traces of himself to the secondary table, using it and never the other thenceforward. Exclusively Clive's was the show-piece of the work-room. Here the young novelist laid out and permanently kept his manuscript, his paper, his ash-trays, his all those odds and ends which a writer will collect about him; here opened his *Magic Casements*; here, almost daily knew the unique happiness of that highest gift of creation to man which is the impulse and the power himself to breathe the breath of life into the nostrils of his clay.

And Exceat, sometimes looking in and seeing him there, would steal away touched with that other peculiar creative happiness vouchsafed to man, the happiness of giving happiness.

And this was a matter — this finding himself suffused with

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a peculiar happiness by happiness given to another — which one evening, and thenceforward frequently, he began to ponder. In the life now his, the glad and wholesome activities of his daylight hours were followed by evenings serene as with the breathless hush of summer night upon a lake. Often in those exquisite quietudes his thoughts would go to his design of devising down here a book to be done with a new, an uncommercial, pen. The garnered harvest of his mind, on which he had speculated that down here in some fashion or other he would draw, was opening, he had the feeling. Seated at the table of his adoption — the other, unoccupied but most pleasurably associated, in his view across the room — with mind undisturbed by sound without or by vexatious thought within, he would draw paper towards himself and take up pen. He did not write but he was ready to write. His mood (though he would have made mock if told it) was that in which by the creative artist is awaited those influences, termed inspiration, which are in fact the intuitive recognition of the sole phrase in all possible combinations of words, of the one colour in all shades miscible upon the palette, of the single chord renderable in all harmonies, with which to transfix his idea, and which, when at last his spirit divines it, he fastens upon as seizes the consummate angler the precise moment at which to strike his fish.

And on the evening when, meditatively looking towards the table he had given up, he recalled and felt anew the peculiar happiness which had welled up in him at his glimpse

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that afternoon of Clive absorbed there in his art, he experienced suddenly impression of as it were a confluence within him of the influences he had been awaiting, an impingement of them upon a focus in the storehouse of his mind, a direction by them of his attention towards a particular quarter of his harvest yield. Happiness felt from happiness given was this centre upon which he found himself to be concentrated; and, concentrated, it came to him suddenly — “Is giving of happiness, then, the secret of happiness, the source from which happiness in its pure form — having necessary to it, that is to say, nothing material, nothing outwardly dependent — may be drawn?” And holding up this question as may be held up to the light by the chemist the precipitant which he has distilled, “But what is pure happiness?” he then inquired of himself and saw “It is life at perfection.” And immediately then, successively stage by stage, revelation by revelation, shedding each time a covering as petals of a calyx unfolding towards its heart — “Is happiness, then, life; life happiness? Is giving happiness living; living giving happiness? Is to give to live; to live to give?”

And as though the instrument in his hand were the needle of a compass answering the direction of his inward eye, he felt his fingers contract upon his pen.

He is to be imagined in his time now following as frequently in speculation upon this thesis thus proposed, carrying it constantly with him for examination in this moment

## HE IS DISMAYED

and in that as on a walking-tour a student will carry with him a text-book, drawing it from his pack in his leisure or sometimes, his mind turning to it, as he wends his way. "Is to give to live? All living things, from lowliest plants upwards to man, mysteriously are given life. And all give back, all contribute to life. Is it in the measure that they give back their essential properties to life that they receive, enjoy, life?"

He is to be remembered as occupied by the thesis, it is to be imagined as running currentwise through him, while now he is followed in the preoccupations with which now he becomes engaged. And similarly as running currentwise through him is to be imagined his friendship with the pair to whom he had extended the freedom of his house. Jo Pryde, engaged in her hired serfdom five afternoons of the week, had those of Friday, the doctor's golf day, and generally Sunday at her disposal and always, as matter-of-course, at Clive's. They would spend them sometimes in the car, sometimes in walks, but as often as not some portion at least in the workroom, tea excitedly served to them by Charles. Exceat kept out of the way, but often would be brought into the way, summoned by Charles, breathlessly racing up to him where he was working in the grounds. "Here, look alive, they want you, those two, for tea alongside of them. There's those soda scones me Antie's made, hot and the butter fair oozing, an' I'm to tell you they won't touch one of 'em, though not half bursting to, if you don't come."

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"Haven't I told you to put on a clean jacket the days you give them tea?"

Charles's cock-eyes would go, probably, to a dark stain on one of his pockets. "Well, so I did too, and would be now only me Antie says 'No soda scones for you' she says, being in one of her rages with me. And then 'Well, take that one then' she says, one not fitting to rights under the cover, yer see; so I popped it in me pocket fear she'd change her mind 'fore I got back, and that's the butter done that, see?"

"I'll tell you what you'll see, you incredible young pig you. You'll see the price for washing it cut out of your wages this week. Go and put on a clean one and say I'm coming."

In some such fashion Exceat not infrequently would find himself a third when Jo Pryde came to tea. The pair became complementary to his household, supplementary to the tenor of his way. His friendship with them ran through his days as may be seen beneath the surface of the wrist the veins which are complementary to its suppleness, as interwoven in the background of a fabric run the coloured threads supplementary to its texture. This that or other of his preoccupations Exceat might have abstained from and found other; cessation of his intimacy with these two would have removed an influence which tintured all his hours.

So he would have told himself.

Yet with one of them, nevertheless, he was to find him-



## HE IS DISMAYED

self suddenly become, and then increasingly becoming, restrained in exercise of his intimacy. It was not by design, much less by wish, that this restraint entered into his association with that one. It came upon him, when first it manifested itself within him, unaccountable as that shiver which sometimes the frame, entirely independent of the mind, will give. It remained with him, growing upon him, inexplicable (at first) to him as are to one in seeming health the premonitory symptoms of a disorder in his blood.

The period of his actuation by it to the point of acute realization of it, and therefore of intensive self-questioning of it, was that of the very considerable business involved by the matter of Old Chairmender.

## Chapter II

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EXCEAT'S preoccupation with Old Chairmender began also, as had that with Clive Shand and with Jo Pryde, in a life-story related to him; but Old Chairmender's history was not, as had been theirs, communicated to him privily. Old Chairmender's story was at the disposal of all who cared to stand beside him long enough, or, preferring it serial-wise in sections, frequently enough; and it was by exercise of such disposal, several times repeated, that Exceat received it.

Old Chairmender — Quaile from the Police upwards or downwards knew him by no other name than that of his long-abandoned calling — stood all day long in Marketplace propping up the frontage of the Quaile Arms. He stood always in the same spot and he had stood there for so many years when Exceat came to Island House as not only in himself to constitute a permanent feature of Marketplace but to have caused his pitch, when he was not in occupation of it, to have the appearance of a site from which some permanent memorial, a statue maybe or an ancient milestone, had recently been removed. When not himself on view, which was to say between closing-time and his arrival round about nine o'clock of the morn-

## HE IS DISMAYED

ing, the weather-protected reach of wall from which his scarecrow form kept the elements, the patch worn shiny by his shoulders in which this terminated above and the corroded ring of his expectorations about his feet by which it was pedestalled below, so strongly indeed suggested an erstwhile hallowed niche that earnest strangers of antiquarian turn of mind, speculatively gazing, frequently would inquire "Ah, and what used to stand here, I wonder?"

Tarried they until the memorial's return, or chanced they there whilst it was in place, they would learn, much more to the point, why it was there. From the mutter of the effigy's own voice they would learn it — effigy swathed in sacking, one sack about its old legs, another about its old shoulders; in mouth clay pipe so wanting of stem as to appear to be a downward growth from effigy's nose into effigy's lips; on head age-green billycock, two dents and a gaping hole in structure, so wanting in any semblance to a hat as to appear, rather, to be the veritable fungus into which the decay of effigy's face might be expected at any day to sprout. And, take up his mutter at what point the listener might, he would, if he stayed long enough, hear the whole of it. For it was as a picture-house reel, Old Chairmender's mutter: when it reached its end it started again, no waiting, at its beginning.

"Barstards, swines, louses, liars," his mutter would go.

It was not pretty. It certainly would not have passed the Film censor.

## AS ONCE YOU WERE

“Barstards . . . liars.”

In these opprobrious terms he summed up, Old Chairmender, all whom his eyes observed as day in day out he brooded upon Marketplace from his pitch, all likewise upon whom his mind ruminated as its slow and bitter processes ground out his testament of life.

“Barstards . . . liars.”

He hated them all — from the especial hatred that he had for the car-park attendant (“Pickin’ up tips over there in his bleedin’ white coat and his bleedin’ Corporation brassard”) to the general hatred that was his for all the world: the world that was created (he knew!) for the single purpose, actuated by the single design, of conspiracy against him: the world (he knew!) which, thus planned, had brought him to what he was.

“Ole-chairs-to-mend, I was,” his mutter, after his ascription, would continue. “Ole knives —” and throatily he would quaver it, his old familiar strain:

“Ole knives or scissors to grind;

Bring OUT your pots an’ pans an’ kettles — O !

“But old chairs the best job of me an’ a merry old time I ’ad those days, I’m telling yer. You knows, mate, me with me all-shiny yanks of cane; best rattan, mind yer —

“Best rattan,

Best rattan cane;

All springy,

All finest springy rattan cane — O !

## HE IS DISMAYED

"Ah, me with the likes of that splicin' up the bums of their chairs all tight an' sweet an' shiny like a bleedin' drum. Me sittin' out in the sunshine, mind yer, front of their doors, or in the kitchen like as not if 'twas wet. Ah, an' a cup o' tea an' a bite throwed in, many's the time, with me bob or me ninepence or me arf-doller.

"Ah, fair merry an' all, those days, blast 'em; an' they took me for the bloody war, the barstards, an' me forty, mind yer, an' give me Bible oath I was fifty, more to that. An' whens I comes back out of it after this Armistice as they calls it, when I comes back to me job, where's me job, if yer can tell me?

"Ah, 'ere's these *ortormatic* wood seats for their back-sides taken me job and to hell with me; that's where me job's gone, then. Ah, *ortormatic* wood, tanner a seat at this Woolworth's as they call it, shook in me bloody face an' the door shut on me an' I can go starve, Old Chairmender can.

"Yes, they are then—sixpence, wood *ortormatic*, all punched *ortomatic* ready for the nails, an' the nails give in with them; an' any old bitch as would have run out an' 'ollered for yer, times gone, off now with her shoe an' slap in the nails with the heel of it, an' 'old up at yer an' laugh at yer. . . .

"Barstards, swines, louses, liars . . .

"Yes, an' all ways the same, I'm telling yer, whens you turns for a job you can do, turn where yer bleedin' like. All sold in a shop as cheap the arf-dozen as yer could mend

## AS ONCE YOU WERE

the one, an' chuck away when it's through, an' buy another an 'old up in yer face and laugh at yer.

"Yes, they are, then — pots or scissors, knives or fry-pans; pick 'em up, you can, at these Woolworth's and such as free near as the sparrers used to pick up off the 'orses 'ere; ah, an' me hold their 'eads and give 'em a rub down. Ah, many's the time, I'm telling yer, an' many's the tanner, afore that barstard, 'im in the bleedin' white coat over there, comes with his cars and his tickets an' his Corporation armband and what-not, an' starves the little bleeders off the road and starves me too, rot his guts. Barstards, swines, louses, liars. Ole-chairs-to-mend, I was, ole knives —

"Ole knives or scissors to grind;  
Bring OUT your pots an' pans an' kettles — O !"

Exceat took this old leper, leprous inside and out (the term, and there was none hearing it but endorsed it, was that of Brigadier Sir Marmaduke Eridge when informed of the event) up to Island House and made home for him there.

## Chapter III

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JESUS what wouldn't I not give for a cup of 'ot cocoa!" This was the groan, interpolated in the endless monologue on a bitter Friday night, that fetched Old Chairmender up to Island House. It smote Exceat horridly. He could not get it from his ears. At the time, paused beside Old Chairmender while it was groaned, he had done for him what the half-crown in his pocket could do. But the cry followed him on the icy wind all the way home to Island House; entreated of him from the warmth and comfort of the workroom as he entered it; implored of him from the soup and joint set before him by Charles in the eating-room; besought of him from his musing, pen in hand, with writing-pad before him, from his stamp-album, from his detective novel, from every distraction ministering to him in his pleasant ease between his dinner and his bedtime in which he sought to forget it.

"Jesus, what wouldn't I not give for a cup of 'ot cocoa!"

And in the morning, haunted still, he began those steps which led him on the afternoon of the day following to —

"Not seriously?" young Shand expostulated.

Returning from what he had been doing, Exceat had seen Clive and Jo through the workroom window seated

## AS ONCE YOU WERE

at tea, had been enthusiastically beckoned and had joined them, and presently was telling of what he projected in the matter of Old Chairmender. He addressed himself to Clive. The conversation was between them. From Jo's direction he averted his eyes and she was not drawn in. She sat silent.

"Not seriously?"

"Well, it's in my mind," Exceat declared, "'pon my soul it is."

"Well, but I mean to say — dash it, he's lousy. I wouldn't like to touch him; nobody would. I doubt even they'd have him in the casual ward of the workhouse."

Exceat laughed. "I doubt it too."

"Well, there you are."

"Yes, but all the same —"

And he frowned down into his tea-cup and sat there frowningly stirring it.

"But there must be ways surely of helping him," Clive suggested, "without bringing him into your house?"

"There aren't, not of helping him as he needs to be helped. There's nobody would take him in, not in the slums here even, not as he is and as he would persist in living. I've made inquiries."

"Yes — as he would persist in living: there you are; you've said it."

"Yes, it's the point, but not as you mean, Clive. If he had anyone to take an interest in him, in decent surroundings, he could be weaned out of his awfulness."



## HE IS DISMAYED

"I can't see," said Clive with a croak, "Miss Baize weaning him."

Exceat did not join the grin. Frowning still, he put down his cup, drummed with his fingers on the table, then spoke the tune of his thoughts. "I wouldn't bring him into the house. I'd fit him up a bed and a fire and decent comfort in the harness-room of the stable out there. And I'd wean him myself. Mind you, Clive, I've talked with the old chap. I know his story. I know what he sees while he sits there muttering. I've seen where he sleeps, on reeking straw in a filthy shed in the yard of a slum cottage and pays nine-pence a week for it when he can scrounge as much. Well, there's that harness-room, dry and sound; and here's me feeling that I know exactly how, as you call it, to wean the poor devil; and there's he shut of the smallest comfort that even the worst-treated cur will get. It's not right, by God, it's not."

And he had looked up then and for the first time since he had begun to speak of this matter had caught the eyes of Jo Pryde, fixed upon him.

She had contributed no word to their discussion. His engagement now of her eyes should have conveyed to her, in normal intercourse between friends, a questioning of her opinion, an invitation to advance it. But his look gave her no such question or invitation. He was deeply now in that period in which when in her presence he knew that strange feeling of restraint in his attitude towards her. She had a trick, thus feeling he had come to notice, of watch-

## AS ONCE YOU WERE

ing him, silent, while, deliberately avoiding touch with her, he talked with Clive. Without looking at her he would be conscious of her gaze upon him. Impelled thereto as commonly by such suspicion one will be, warily he presently would move his eyes towards her and would find, invariably, that his sensations had rightly informed him.

And he would make then his look that thus met hers a blank look as though, bemused, he did not see her, and blankly would move it on.

He did so now.

## Chapter IV

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CLOCK in the workroom will tick five more of its almost inaudible ticks before it registers midnight.

Exceat has been sitting here in the quietude, pen in hand, pad before him, as so frequently; but this time for hours, since short indeed of ten.

And he suddenly now, for the first time since his retirement, begins at last to write. It is not the opening of any work that he had ever meditated. That which he writes he had no intention of writing when he sat down. He has been thinking about it; but he has been thinking about it in terms of presenting it to another who, though not here with him, yet is there before his mental eyes, watching him; and it is in relief of his muteness and of hers, in relief of the dumbness to which in her actual presence he has been constrained and to which, with those blank looks, he has constrained her, that, suddenly dipping his pen, he puts it to the pad before him and writes:

Old Chairmender [he writes] pulls closer about him the rotted sack that is his cloak against the bitter night and

## AS ONCE YOU WERE

groans anew his cry for what, body and mind, flesh and soul, he craves.

A woman, stout, befurred, approaches him to pass him where he stands. He slides his eyes this way and that — wolf in a cage, Ishmael with every hand against him — to assure himself no bleeding copper is in hearing; and “Lady,” he hoarsely then beseeches, “the cold; the starve hunger of me, lady. A penny, a cup of cocoa, a penny — ”

And she has passed; and “— her,” he sends after her, the only benison which humanity’s disposition to him has accustomed him to bestow; and with a hand blue and grey, blue of its frozen bloodlessness, grey of its soddenness in grime of years, wipes the ice that will form (“— it”) on the drippings from his nose, blistering his lip; and returns his fingers, aching, stiff, to their office of holding the rotted sacking about his throat.

“Jesus, what wouldn’t I not give for a cup of ’ot cocoa. Jesus, what wouldn’t I.”

Exceat halts his pen, and looks upon what it has written; and “Why couldn’t I tell her,” his thoughts run, “that that was what I saw? . . . What is in her mind when she looks at me like that; and what in mine when, catching her gaze upon me, I blankly move away my eyes? . . . Was she inquiring of me why I intend to succour this old man? What other could the question in her eyes have been? And if but that, why could not I tell her, by what

## HE IS DISMAYED

was I withheld from describing to her, that it is because he desired last night . . . because he desires as he stands there . . . because he desires . . .”

Lamp of her face upon the picture that he sees, his fingers move again towards his pen; which taken —

He desires [his pen writes] a cup of cocoa as a ravening wolf, ferocious with hunger, desires prey. But there is no power, much less fury, in his limbs, enfeebled by his years, beyond his years enfeebled by his course of life and by life's course of him; stiff now with bitter chill. Nor is there order, much less power, in his brain, that ravel of disconnected strands that now can do no better with a thought than let it stumble up and down, to and fro, in and out, as a fly deprived of its wings stumbling in a bottle of hay, until, despairing of the maze, it dies.

In Old Chairmender's brain as he stands there there is no kindling stronger than a dull cinder of resentment at his lot, by weight of oppression damped down to futile smoulder as ashes of a garden bonfire by barrow-load of autumn leaves. Yet as a wolf avid for blood is his craving for a cup of cocoa. He can smell it, the thick sweet savour of it. He can taste it, the heavy sweetness of it on his shrivelled tongue. He can feel it trickling, hot sweet thick, down his paining throat and into his empty stomach and through his every vein and artery to every uttermost particle of him, as fresh new blood, as sunshine, as fireside, as youth renewed.

## AS ONCE YOU WERE

"Dare I not tell her," paused again, Exceat inquires of himself, "things which move me, for fear that, being moved, I should release repressed emotions, as wine, seducing discipline of thought, will free ungoverned speech? Gave I that blank look to her look in order to cover as with a lid the gaze which those emotions, deep in their fastness in me, bend upon her? . . . But what emotions? What feelings should I, in my years, have towards this fledgeling in her virgin loveliness that I must hide them from her? What?"

He stares, as if for answer, on the written sheets before him, then writes on —

A young man comes towards him making for the alley on which, discreetly, the Quaile Arms opens its saloon-bar. A young man, plump, rosy, overcoated, muffled, cigar in mouth, who pauses right there before Old Chairmender to relight his smoke.

"Gentleman, a penny; a cup of 'ot cocoa for God Almighty's Love. Gentleman, only a penny. Starve famished, bone froze, gentleman, I am. Just a cup; just one cup round the corner there, gentleman — "

And gentleman, his round rosiness lit by the match he cups between his hands, between his puffs growls sourly down upon his suppliant, "Cup of cocoa!" *Puff, puff*. "Why the hell don't you tell the truth and say gin like a man?" *Puff, puff*. "Bloody side more likely to get it, let me tell you, if you did." *Puff, puff*.

And chucks the match, and passes down the alley where

## HE IS DISMAYED

"Saloon" and "Private Bar" gleam richly in red lighting on golden ground.

And "— him," Old Chairmender casts his benediction; and since no one tonight out of all the world's wealth will spare him his sole desire which is just one penny; since none of the passing pockets in which lie, inert, unthought of by their possessors, pound and ten-shilling notes, half-crowns, florins, shillings, will spare him out of their abundance his one desire which is just one penny — since, in the pitiless proof of hour upon hour of this bitter cold and cramping hunger, his craving is to be denied, he calls mind and body to the only resource he has, which is, simply, to hug himself together into his rags. He is aching with chill, he is sick with hunger, he is a surgeon's case in half his organs, a physician's in the rest; so he encompasses for himself the sole palliative possible to him out of all the world's richness and all its warmth and all its succours and its comforts: he hugs himself together.

And he gazes then upon the only prospect which out of all the earth's fair prospects it is his to see, which is a granite wall standing within a foot of his nose, reaching from hell below to heaven above and to the poles on either hand; and granite all through.

It is not a material wall upon which Old Chairmender thus looks. It is a symbolical wall. It is his portion and his prospects; his present and his future; his days' end.

Exceat's own eyes consider the wall drawn by his pen, and he rests his pen. "I could have told all that to Clive,"

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his thoughts run; "but I did not want to tell it to Clive. To do so would have been an exposure of the feelings moved in me by the case of this old man, and one shrinks from exposing one's feelings, from making an exhibition of one's heart, except it be to . . . But my feelings as I have written them down there, even more unrestrainedly exposed than ever I would have voiced them to Clive, were voiced, as I wrote them, to her. For months now I have been waiting, almost nightly, the impulse to write, as, coming down here, I promised myself I would write, something that may be in me. And the impulse at last has come, its subject the manner in which I have been moved by consideration of this old outcast's plight. I am letting my pen run, as I promised myself it should run, not for the public eye but for my own private satisfaction. Yet not so. Her face is before me as I write. It is to her eyes, to those child's eyes of hers that I am presenting this matter; to her ears, to that benign intelligence of hers, that I am voicing it. It is indeed because I imagine her to be listening to it while I tell it that the bindings of my feelings are removed. Why . . . To whom is it that one not only is willing to tell things that have disturbed one's inmost nature but is impelled to tell them . . . ?"

He puts his pen to telling more.

Because, mind you, [his pen tells] I have talked with the man. I have got him to talk to me. I know his story.

I know that the granite wall on which day in day out he



## HE IS DISMAYED

stares has been building for him ever since he was whelped — that would be the appropriate word — beneath a tarpaulin pegged over iron hoops beside a tinker's cart; ever since he was thrashed four days out of six with the buckle end of a belt until he stuck a pair of scissors in his father's face and was judged too vicious to be thrashed with safety any more. I can imagine that when he was twenty, thirty, forty, and strong and lusty, he had no more prescience of that wall inevitably coming towards him than he had knowledge of Buddhism or occupation with Plato. I can imagine that, free, for intermittent spells of from seven days to a month in gaol, — free in the tinker's, poacher's, dog-stealer's, horse-coper's life which then was his and of which he has given me glimpses, — he thought, if he thought ever of days beyond today, that he would go on thus for all time.

But he glimpsed the wall after they threw him out from the war into a world which the cheap multiple stores and the motor-cars and such were draining of his means of livelihood. I imagine that soon then he began to see the wall over his shoulder, as a storm-cloud looming up over the horizon is seen by the wayfarer who has no cloak. And soon then to know himself shadowed whichever way he turned by the shadow that it cast. And soon then to know it within range of his voice so that each mutter of his now mounting apprehension in mocking echo was cast back upon him. And soon then to realize it within reach of his hand, so that his fist, at each stretch for wage or pickings, struck

## AS ONCE YOU WERE

against it, bruised and bleeding. And now, as my own eyes have seen, knows it, that wall of granite, to be immediately before his face, causing his condition to be that with whatsoever degree of chill he is chilled, or of hunger he is an-hungered, or of sickness he is sick, the violence of these, breaking against the granite wall, cascades back upon him as seas from a cliff-face upon a drowning swimmer.

I can imagine that the wall as he stands there numb in his faintness, or as he lies dozing in that reeking shed of his, sways sometimes as he watches it, developing the motion of a swell at sea in whose hills and hollows, dizzily up then dizzily down again, he sees days he has known, company with which he has joyed, spreads on which he has feasted. And I can see him, voicing the pictures as I have heard him telling the days, mumbling his part in them as they swim before him.

“’Elp yourself, mate,” I can hear him, “there’s plenty, there’s lashings. . . . Cuddle us, lass; ain’t us snug here, though; ain’t us cosy? . . . Fake ’is tail a bit more, George; that’s proper, that’s the fake of it, boy; wouldn’t know ’is own kennel now, blowed if he would. . . . Blimey, this stew’s to rights, kid. Swap me, the gravy’s like kidney pie in your bleeding mouth. . . . No, I never see’d no ’orse, boss, brown nor bay nor any other colour, I never did. . . . Watch of ’im laughing at me, Sal; see ’im lay hold of me thumb an’ laugh there at his father, fat an’ jolly as a side of bacon, eh? . . . The truth, the ’ole truth and nothin’

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but the truth, swelp me God. . . . 'Elp yourself, mate; plenty there is, lashings. . . ."

And I can imagine him, as I have heard him, starting up from such dreams to stare upon the granite wall, gone rigid, gone pitiless again; and staring, blink and mutter, "Times as I've seed; ay, times, times . . . Ole-Chairs-to-mend, I was. Ole knives or scissors to grind; bring *OUT* yer pots an' pans an' . . . Ay, times, times . . ."

Exceat puts down the pen, pushes from him the pages it has written. "That look," he communes within himself, "which I catch upon her face when I glance up from speech with Clive and catch her watching me and blankly turn away my eyes . . . That look . . . Yes, when I think of it I am reminded of her regard of me twice in her car that day of our second meeting, her head laid back, her eyes inscrutable; and of the sensation, equally mysterious, unfathomable, which it caused in me when I saw it. . . . Was there some hidden chord between us which, when she thus looked, she was touching, I conscious that it had been touched? What chord? Between her years and mine, between inexperience and experience, innocence and knowledge, between life's threshold and the long corridor that turns away beyond the laughter and the music, what possible chord of feeling should there be? . . . There was — in the car that day. There is — when I catch her look upon me and will not answer it. If then, when we had scarcely met, a chord so sensitive, so vitally implanted, to what point of

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responsiveness must it now be charged, into what recondite centres of us must it now have penetrated, when we have met these months and when, lest I disturb it, I dare not hold her eyes? . . .”

He looked towards the papers on which, not daring to trust himself to tell her the motives actuating his intentions towards Old Chairmender, he nevertheless had written them down for her.

Very slowly he edged forward his right hand towards the manuscript; then with a sudden decisive motion drew it to him and tore it into smallest pieces.

## Chapter V

---

TO PROJECT the compassionating of Old Chairmender by bringing him to Island House was one thing; to fetch him there, as the process proved, very much another. Deeply suspicious, rootedly obscurant, "Wot for?" was the scarecrow's response to the invitation put glowingly before him; and Exceat, theretofore amusedly indifferent to what echoes reached him of Quail's scandalization by his commiseration of its leper, knew uncomfortable redness about his cheeks beneath the eyes that watched him as he dealt with the unexpected situation thus uncompromisingly presented to him.

Previously, moreover, had been his engagement with Miss Baize's opinions on the subject, though for this, ever since his laughed endorsement of Clive Shand's inability to see Miss Baize weaning the leper from his leprous habit, he had been prepared. Resistance-power even of a life-long swallowing of other people's tastes had proved insufficient to purse a taste even in her employer for the company of Old Chairmender; and when it burst Exceat dealt with it after his fashion.

Half-laughing, half-exasperated, "Well, dammit," he at length cried to her, "dammit, you don't suppose I'm going

## AS ONCE YOU WERE

to put him in your bedroom with you, do you, or into mine with me? I'm not going to bring him into the house at all, as a matter of fact, not at first, anyway; not in his present state, poor devil. I'm going to fix up the harness-room in the stable for him, as a matter of fact and if only to goodness you'd let me tell you instead of throwing epileptic fits. There's a fireplace in there and I'm going to fix him up all snug and independent as if he were in a house of his own, as he will be so far as you're concerned."

This was less difficult to keep down and Miss Baize, pursing terrifically, managed to contain its greater part.

"And who," alone escaped her sealing, "is going to cook for him, if I may ask?"

"Certainly you may," granted Exceat. "If you roast a round of beef does it make any difference to you who eats it? Does it jump out of the oven and bite you because someone you don't like is going to have a slice off it?"

At which "Haw, haw, haw!" contributed Charles, polishing dish-covers on the scene of the battle, which was the kitchen, a delighted listener.

"Hold your row," commanded Exceat. "If you ask," he continued his fire, "if you've got to carry your cooking out to him on a silver tray —"

The pursing burst again. "No, that's to be Charles's pleasant task, I suppose?"

Charles, who from his first hearing of Old Chairmender's coming had regarded the whole matter as the highest form of lark, done for his especial entertainment, enthusiasti-

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cally accepted this. "Yes, and I tell you what I vote to it," coming forward dish-cover in one hand, polisher in the other, he addressed Exceat, "I vote we gets one of those Boy Scout billy-cans an' Antie pops his food in and I carry it out just like Scout-camping, eh? I haven't half wanted one of those billies a long time, I haven't."

"Get on with your polishing, dash you. Now come, Miss Baize, be sensible about the thing. Matter of fact the old man will probably much prefer to do his own cooking. I'll fit him up with billies and kettles and tin plates and things, and get him his own rations and —"

"Blimey," excitedly from the polisher, "what if I —"

"Hold your row, won't you, haven't I told you?"

"Yes, but you listen a minute," insisted Charles, pressing his dish-cover against Exceat's chest, the better to command his attention. "You listen. What if I go on rations too and cook out there along with him? Our Scoutmaster says —"

"Do you see that scullery door?" Exceat demanded. "Take your dishes and get yourself the other side of it."

He waited while the cheerfully grinning Charles, to whom his orders always were apparently a kind of highly diverting game, obeyed him, then pressed home the mollifications which Miss Baize now was showing signs of successfully keeping down. "There, I knew perfectly well you'd be your sensible self about this, Miss Baize, once you knew the arrangement of it. Old Chairmender need be no nearer you out there in the stable than he's been down at

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the Quaile Arms. I'm not comparing Charles for a moment with that poor old vagabond, but you can see for yourself how the boy has picked up and spruced up since I've dressed him and had him in hand, and that's what I'm going to do with this poor old wretch, clean him up and dress him up, bit by bit you know, and jolly soon, you mark my words, you'll be inviting him into your kitchen here to sit and gossip with you like any old Christian. That's what I'm out to do."

"Well, there's all tastes," admitted Miss Baize; and it was an admission, Exceat well knew, which, once granted in respect of an outrage, condoned it thenceforward fully licensed.

That was all right then in regard to his housekeeper's feelings, mortification of which had been expected. The feelings with which Exceat had never anticipated difficulty were those of Old Chairmender himself.

"I've been thinking a lot about you since the talks we've had together," Exceat, first cheerily accosting him at his pitch, had then begun his proposal, "and I've got an idea for you. How would you like to give up this wretched existence of yours and come along up to where I live? I can put a decent roof over your head, give you rather a jolly room with a fire in it, and make you pretty comfortable all round, I think."

In steady rain and in raw temperature delivered direct from the north-east he had walked down from Island House on his mission; and as rendered by these conditions the



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pitiable figure to whom he spoke was ripe, he imagined, to receive his offer with a gratitude that might prove embarrassing. Doubt, however, was the kindest term for the emotion which blinked from the bleary eyes regarding him; but as doubt of the too-good-to-be-true order Exceat rather naturally interpreted it. "I mean it," he affirmed heartily, "and I mean it now, today, not next week; and permanently, not for a couple of nights or just as a makeshift. It's in my stables, the room you'll have. I don't use them except as workshops and you'll have the building and the yard all to yourself just like a little house of your own. Jolly good, eh?"

"Wot for?"

Dark suspicion filled the tone but Exceat, not yet aware that the way of the Samaritan when dealing with one unaccustomed to succour may be, like that of the transgressor, hard, did not immediately recognize it as such. "What for?" he puzzled. "How do you mean What for?"

"Wot's the game?"

This was nearer to the issue as Old Chairmender saw it but still was incomprehensibly foreign to it from Exceat's view.

"The game?"

"Interferin' with a bloke," explained Old Chairmender truculently and surprisingly.

"Interfering with you!" cried Exceat.

"I never done you no 'arm, did I?"

"Of course you haven't. What on earth — ?"

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"Well, then," said Old Chairmender, and spat as one who seals finality.

Exceat stared. "Well, I'm damned," he ejaculated, bafflement and indignation mingled in his tone.

The effect of this disclosure of his feelings was good. Whether it conveyed to Old Chairmender a sincerity of good will or an apology for evil intentions, a genuineness of friendship or an admission of guile, is not to be known. Something conciliatory, something as he would have said "matey," at all events appeared to be taken from the exclamation, for in accents less aggressive though not less firm he extended now amplification of his experiences in the matter of interference.

"I've had 'em after me afore," growled Old Chairmender, amplifying. "Blokes, ah, an' ole bitches too, they're the worse, they are, coming after you with Bibles and tracks and such like to wash yourself and lead a new life and shake off sin an' such. Ah, many's the time I've 'ad 'em. Bleeders."

Exceat laughed. The position was clarified. "I'm not after you with Bibles," he said, "or to shake off sin or anything like it. I'm simply telling you that I've got a stable where you can live in warmth and comfort and where I'll see to your grub and you need never know misery and hunger any more, and that's all. D'you see?"

Old Chairmender spat and stared upon the spit as if there examining what he was asked to envisage.

"Ah, an' I've had that sort, too," he then communicated. "Work yer guts out for a bowl of soup and such. I'm past

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work. When I could work there wasn't no work; and now they stick work in me bloody face when I can't 'ardly scratch meself leave alone chop wood or such, an' they say 'Go starve then.' I've 'ad 'em. Bleeders."

"You won't have 'em up there with me," said Exceat cheerfully. He was to sense, if not exasperation, at least the feeling of being up against a pretty graceless proposition before this business was through; but to the end he was able to laugh at himself and at this early point of the proceedings he was not to be discouraged. "There'll be no chopping wood or pulling weeds or anything else," he continued. "I've got a comfortable place that no one lives in and I'm offering it to you and that's all there is to it. No conditions, nothing. Just a friendly arrangement between the two of us. Now d'you see?"

Old Chairmender's response, if an advance on his previous attitude, was tintured more with caution than with enthusiasm.

"Where's it to?"

"Island House. Couple of miles up the Fulchester road there."

"How'll I get there?"

"I'll get you there. Now look, I tell you what. I'll get the room all nicely fixed-up for you, and this afternoon" — he thought for a moment of how long the fixing-up might involve — "round about four I'll pick you up in a car and take you up to look at it and judge for yourself. You can see the idea much better then than I can explain it to you,

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and you can stay a day or two and if you don't like it come back again. Eh?"

"Ah, and find," was Old Chairmender's next objection, "some other bleeder's pinched my pitch."

"It isn't likely; and we'd mighty soon have him out of it if he had."

"Ah, break 'is bloody neck for 'im I would," declared with appreciative ferocity the past-work incapable-of-pulling-weeds.

"I bet you would. Good, that's fixed then. I'll come for you round four o'clock and you'll just try it out?"

"Well, I don't mind if I do," Old Chairmender graciously consented.

Off through the rain tramped Exceat now to make purchases for the reception of his guest. Securing the guest had been less gratifying, though, as he smiled to himself, considerably more amusing, than he had anticipated; but furnishing for him was unqualified entertainment of a kind which he particularly enjoyed. Strong smack of desert-island camping was in it; that old chap was going to be snug with a snugness himself would have revelled in; and it was with this aim, and with no sense of charitable enterprise, that he set about his shopping.

At a household-equipment store, antipodes of Mr. Batiscombe's antique galleries but thrilling treasure-ground for a settler's wants, were chosen, methodically starting with the settler's floor, coconut matting and gay hearthrug;

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enamelled iron bedstead, mattress, bolsters and four grey army blankets; deal washstand with gay yellow-enamelled utensils ("Though whether he'll ever use 'em or even know what they're for!"); chest-of-drawers to match ("Though for certain he'll wear all the clothes I get him all at once and all the time!"); stout kitchen table and gay tablecloth; stout armchair, comfortably padded; three solid Windsor chairs. The harness-room did itself well in fitted cupboards, no need for a dresser.

Off to the thrills of the hardware department!

Here two saucepans, frying-pan, kettle; half-a-dozen knives, forks, spoons ("Must have some spares, the old chap"); mugs, saucers, tumblers, plates, two buckets, fire-irons, scrubbing-brush, hard and soft broom.

The grocer's now! Mustard, pepper, salt; jam, pickles; cocoa, tea, sugar; soap ("Will he think it's something to eat?"); cheese, rashers, tinned beef, tinned pork and beans, tinned soup. ("For snacks and for emergencies. Dash, forgot a tin-opener at that other shop, and a corkscrew, by gum.") Winemerchant's: Bottle of whiskey ("Have to ration him, I expect, but do him good to see a full bottle when he arrives"); dozen of beer.

So much, and immensely exciting, for the fittings and the commissariat. Clothing presented more of a problem. That Old Chairmender on arrival would never consent to strip, Exceat felt quite sure; that he would consider taking any form of bath was an outrage on normal possibilities. When he had been in hand some days — "some weeks,

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more likely, months perhaps!" — hygienic eccentricities of these kinds might be cautiously introduced to his notice; but until then to supply him with underclothing, much less with bedwear, would be a futility. Best, in any case, to wait until he could be seen divested of those repulsive sacks of his and then to judge how most suitably to deal with the point.

Thus determining, Exceat, at the outfitter's which had supplied Charles, went no further therefore for Old Chairmender's person than a chin-to-shin-enveloping carter's greatcoat, a cardigan jacket, two pairs of thickest socks, pair of boots and pair of carpet-slippers. At a chemist's a brush and comb ("What for?") and a tooth-brush ("Why not a manicure-set and bath salts while I'm about it?"), safety-razor and brush; at a tobacconist's, clays and shag; and, his keenness on his absorbing enterprise sharply whetted by these comprehensive and mountainous steps towards it, Exceat hurried himself then to Island House and up to the stables where his purchases, delivery in each case stipulated for one o'clock, were to be received.

Charles had been left in preparation of the harness-room, a task upon which he had entered with the high enthusiasm with which, as Exceat was for ever telling him, "You jump at any new job in order to leave the one you're on, and then stand by and watch me do it."

"Well you can reach higher than what I can," had been Charles's rejoinder to the remark as illustrated in its latter implication by the brooming-down of the harness-room walls.

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"Well, get a packing-case out of the loose-box there, man, and stand on it," Exceat, coughing cobwebs brought down by his broom, had replied.

He had finished the walls himself, however, before leaving, and washed also the shelves. With Charles had rested the scrubbing of the brick floor, cleaning of the windows and lighting of the fire, tasks which, performed, would convert the room, keenly Exceat told himself, into a delightful little cottage interior. Visualizing it warm and gleaming as now he briskly entered the stable-yard his first intimation of this prospect was the sight of a bass broom-head leaning out through a smashed window-pane as though to take the air, his second, as furiously he opened the door, spectacle of Charles seated on a packing-case reading a magazine before a fireplace crammed with charred newspaper and smouldering sticks.

"Just watching the fire burn up," announced Charles, twisting up his chin in the cock-eyed way he appeared to find necessary for the accommodation of his vision to lateral objects, and smiling cheerfully.

"Watching the fire! That's all you're fit for, watching, and you can't even do that. Look at your fire! How the devil have you managed to break that window, that's what I want to know."

"Well, the broom went right through it," explained Charles, his tone suggesting invitation to share a mild wonder at such deportment in an ordinary broom.

Exceat did not accept the invitation. "Do you clean windows with a broom, you incredible stick of uselessness,

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you? And when you've bashed it through the glass do you leave it there for me to take out? 'Pon my soul, Charles, the more I see of you the more utterly useless I find you. There's not a thing, not one single blighted thing, that you can be left to do but you either don't attempt to do it or do it and make it worse. Look at that fire. Call yourself a Boy Scout? If you can't even light a fire in a grate, how you'd do one in the open — ”

“Ah, outdoors,” broke in Charles, “that's different. Our Scoutmaster says — ”

“Damn your Scoutmaster. Now I've got to filthy myself doing this for you”; and angrily Exceat threw off his mackintosh, turned up his jacket cuffs and ferociously began to clear the grate. “Look at this; look at this! Newspaper rolled up like an iron football, sticks and coal like a ton avalanche, how the devil do you expect — look at it, look at it!”

But Exceat's heats with Charles invariably at some sooner or later point were blown into exasperated laughter despite himself by the manner of their reception. Always Charles looked on cock-eyedly grinning as though at a spectacle specially staged for him; always he contributed, when his turn came, a remark which put aside the occasion, whether regarded as fury or as fun, as completely as if it had never been.

So now, to “Look at it, look at it!” — “Yes, well, I think I'll just pop off down to my Antie,” was his reception of the behest, “and get my lunch cocoa”; and Exceat, feeling



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as usual the comic hopelessness of the case, could do no better than cover his amused chagrin by assumed severity.

"You'll do nothing of the sort. You'll damn well stay here and take a lesson in firelaying and try to remember it. Now, look. You think, like every other idiot, that there're only three things wanted to build a grate fire: wood, paper and coal. You're wrong; there're four, and the fourth's the most important — air. Build a nest like this — see."

Fire-lighting was an art on which Exceat prided himself. First at each side of the grate a pier of coal or ashes; between the piers loosely thrown scraps of paper; bridgewise upon the piers, bridging the paper, four or five sticks of firewood; across these more sticks; so upward in an open-work stack of three or four storeys. Now nicely-poised bits of fresh coal, piled as high as avoidance of too-close packing would permit. "And there's your stack — air, you see, everywhere. Match to your paper shreds — and look at it!"

And up, sure enough, shot tongues of flame, glorious crackling of wood responding.

"Cooh! Wot-o Guy Fawkes!" cried Charles, delighted.

"Told you so," affirmed Exceat, gratified. "Now, big-gish lump ready to shove under your sticks when your paper's burnt out so your sticks won't collapse. Like that. And there you are." He stood up proudly. "That's a fire, eh?"

"Not half, it isn't," declared Charles, constrained to hold

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in his admiration by hugging his long arms about himself. "Not half I won't show our Scoutmaster next time."

"You can bet he knows," pronounced Exceat, "all men do. It's only servants who've been lighting fires all their lives that don't."

Pleased into highest good humour by his own skill he dismissed Charles to his lunch cocoa. The broken window, he reflected, after all would supply that ventilation which quite certainly Old Chairmender would admit from no other source; and he had just got all sweeping and dusting to his satisfaction when simultaneously the van from the furnishing stores and the cyclist errand-boy from the clothier's appeared in the yard, and the real excitement of dressing the harness-room began.

Unthinkable to leave such thrills for lunch. "Bring me up some biscuits and cheese," he commanded Charles, "and hurry all you know over your own dinner"; and a Charles, thrilled as himself, dropping all he touched and highly entertained by his employer's cries of wrath thereat, enthusiastically hindered him until were reached, towards three o'clock, finishing touches to what Exceat wholeheartedly declared to be "a jolly fine lay-out."

It was. Coconut matting neatly set up the centre, border of newly-scrubbed bricks on either side, rose-gay hearth-rug at the fender. Shelves glittering with tins and ware. Bed double-blanketed on the mattress with twin companion grey blankets neatly folded back at foot. "One under you worth two over you; always remember that when

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you're making a bed, Charles." Greatcoat laid out on chest-of-drawers, cardigan and socks upon it. Armchair to fireside; tin of shag-tobacco, two clay pipes and matches on Windsor chair beside it. Carpet slippers one side of the hearth, boots the other. Kettle filled and standing ready on the hob. Table set for a meal with chair drawn up. Fire superbly casting its glow and radiating its warmth —

"He won't half not wonder where he's got to," was Charles's ecstatic endorsement of "Jolly fine lay-out" as the two stood together, backs to door, taking final survey.

"Well, I think it's about as good as we can make it for the old chap," agreed Exceat. "Nothing more you can suggest is there?"

Charles turned his thick spectacles this way and that in the manner of one searching for something mislaid and then suggested, "Tell you what though! As it's a sort of welcome, as you might say, what about a lot of those paper streamers hung round like we have in our Scouts' room Christmas?"

Exceat swallowed a smile. "No, I don't think streamers, Charles."

"Ah, or a few texts bunged round on the walls?"

Exceat recalled Old Chairmender's views on blokes with Bibles and tracts coming after you to lead a new life and shake off sins, and negatived texts also. "Might pick up a picture or two later on," he said, "that's an idea certainly. What about a few flowers, though?"

Charles croaked delight. "Flowers, yes. That's good."

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"There's nothing growing, of course, but skits of bulbs in the house. Get a couple of bowls, get three and stick one on the mantelpiece and the table and the chest-of-drawers. Look now, Charles, you see to that and keep the fire going and the kettle warming, ready to boil up when we arrive. I'll tell your aunt to give you a loaf and some butter, and while he's having a go at one of those tins of beef we'll hot him up a plate of pork-and-beans. I'm off now to fetch him; and now you listen here, Charles, and damn well attend to what I say. This absolutely topping little cabin is going to be your job of work to keep bright and clean, just as it is now, until we've taught Old Chairmender to do it for himself. Understand? Spick and span just as you see it now."

"Won't I just!" declared Charles, hugging himself. "That's just what I'll like doing, that will be."

"Well, it'll be the first job I've known you like if it is. So you watch it, my boy. Every morning there'll be a kit inspection up here, Army-fashion; and if I find so much as a dirty cup you'll get a twisting that'll make you not know your face from your feet."

"If I don't have my Antie fussing round after me," declared Charles earnestly, "you'll be surprised to see what I can do."

"You'll have me instead and you'll be surprised then," Exceat assured him, "to find what fussing round can be." He opened the door. "It's stopped raining, thank goodness. I'll step in and speak to your aunt about the bread,

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and when you've shoved some more coal on, and cleared up all that parcel paper, you can go along down and collect it and the flowers. Right"; and he went; Charles's cheerfully familiar "So long!" after him.

But within the half-minute Exceat was back again, new excitement in his face. "I *say*, Charles, I've just got a whale of an idea. Old Chairmender won't want to be in here all his time; he's lived in the open all his life and you bet he likes it. Well, look here. Out in the yard here we'll fix up a bucket-fire for him same as night watchmen have. Imagine him" — Exceat's face was shining with his own imagination of it — "sitting there warming his old bones, and watching you and me coming in and out for our gardening tools, and feeding the sparrows, and snuffing the breeze, and all that. Imagine it, eh?"

"Blimey, that beats the band and all!"

If the notion had enthralled Exceat, Charles it moved, with this exclamation, to heights compelling ungainly bounds in the air, long arms flapping. "Imagine me and him," he contributed to the picture, "sitting there together roasting potatoes and all!"

"Well, that, too, I daresay, in your off time. In that corner, I vote we stick the bucket. A packing-case to sit on and —"

"Blimey, blimey!" cried Charles, leaping anew.

"And look, stand still, you crazy ass. There's a bucket that's been used for the very purpose up near the pond —"

"In that ditch back of they trees! I remember it."

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"That's right; and that bit of old grating in the lumber stall here will be the very thing, raised on bricks, to stand it on. Scout up for the bucket and I'll fix the grating; and, look, Charles, if you can get a coke fire nicely bristling in it by the time I get Old Chairmender up I'll give you half-a-crown."

"You'll want a fire-engine to put it out," declared Charles, "the way I'll have it bristerling."

"Good boy!"

## Chapter VI

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AWAY NOW down into Marketplace went Exceat, brightly in his mind this new outdoor bucket-fire attraction with which to seduce any fresh doubts that may have arisen in Old Chairmender's mind during his absence.

A coke fire in a bucket in a sheltered corner was, he admitted to himself, more in keeping as frame for the Quaile Arms effigy than a spick and span bed-sitting-room. He forbade his mind, seizing upon this admission, to subscribe to a once-heard opinion that to put a pig in a drawing-room is to make a pig-sty of the apartment, not an elegant of the pig. But his ruling on the point appeared to be questioned by the reception of his attempts, Marketplace reached, to charter conveyance for his protégé to the delights prepared for him.

No taxi-driver on the town's two ranks, no garage proprietor of the four he visited, having heard of the fare's identity, would hear further of the proposal. They were all very polite. They were all very firm. In particularization of Old Chairmender they used, one and all, tolerably close variants of the "What, that lousy old bundle of sacks" exclaimed by the first of whom request was made; and in their dumbfounded amazement at hearing that Exceat was

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taking him, to *live*, at his place of residence, they provided, severally and unitedly, a foretaste of Quaile's scandalized endorsement of Brigadier Sir Marmaduke Eridge's opinions on the matter.

With the first and second refusals Exceat, for the first time since he had decided to compassionate Old Chairmender, found himself something misgiven. By taking to his home a vagabond whom the very chauffeurs would not suffer in their cars, was he indeed going further than was sensible? But with the third refusal he became, instead, annoyed; and increasingly thereafter, as Pharaoh against the Israelites, he hardened his heart against these obstacles and the uncharity for which they stood. "Blast these people. That poor old chap. If it was a dog in the equal condition there'd be a crowd round it with old women with saucers of milk and the first Rolls Royce along stopped by its owner to take the poor thing to the vet's. But because it's a human creature rotting to death — keep away and let him rot as he deserves, the disgusting disgrace! Damn the lot of them, I'll have him up and give him the decency I've got ready for him if I have to shove him all the way in the wheelbarrow."

And it was precisely as, emerging from another garage repulse, he added to his heat this last bit of fuel, that there passed before him a tumbril farm-cart heading towards the Fulchester road and driven by a man with whom several times, out on the Wizard in a lane beyond Island House, he had exchanged good-days.



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"Better than a wheelbarrow, by gum," he exclaimed to himself and hailed his nodding-acquaintance, a gaitered bucolic whose face appeared to have been cut out of a round of raw beef, where he sat upon his near shaft between his cart and the immense white horse which drew it.

"Going up past my place?"

"I be, sir."

"Will you give that old chap over there a lift up?"

The raw beef face turned in the direction pointed. "What, Old Chairmender over there? Ah, why not?"

"Ask those taxi-drivers," said Exceat bitterly; "they won't look at him."

"All one to me what I carts," was the other's response to this. "How far's he going, the old chap?"

"Up to my stables."

Where and for what purpose his loads were taken also apparently was all one to the adaptable nature on the shaft, for with no comment other than a surprisingly harsh "Gerrarp" to the white horse, which the white horse, even more surprisingly, decoded as explicit instruction to turn about and head directly across to the Quaile Arms, he accepted the office, Exceat, well pleased, cheerfully following.

"You go in and get yourself a pot of beer," arrived opposite Old Chairmender he told the carter, passing him a shilling. "Get that tailboard down first, will you"; and Exceat turned then to the destined passenger, morosely

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blinking at the arrangements made for his conveyance. "Hulloa, Chairmender, here we are. All ready?"

Reverse of readiness, stubborn root indeed, was suggested by Old Chairmender's mien. Since his grudging acceptance of Exceat's proposals in the morning, he had lost, as it appeared, his stemless pipe-bowl and, substituting for its comfort a ceaseless chewing motion of his jaws, gave strongly to Exceat the impression that any utterance from them was unlikely to be in the nature of those of a glad-some child about to be collected for a school-treat.

The impression was correct.

"Thought you said a car," was Old Chairmender's first release, sulkily growled.

"Well, I've brought a cart instead," said Exceat cheerfully. "Long as something gets us there, what's the odds?"

"Odds?" returned Old Chairmender disgustedly. "Odds?" — pronouncing the word as who should say "What's that got to do with it?" — "'Ow will I get up into the like of that?"

"I'll get you up."

"Break my bleeding neck, like as not"; and chewing over this bleak and violent prospect Old Chairmender stood himself morosely deaf alike to the assurances with which Exceat strove to discountenance its possibility and to the cajolements touching the good things in store with which he sought to urge that at least it should be put to the test.

Other and more appreciative audience Exceat, to his increasing embarrassment, found to be swelling about him.

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His search for vehicle for his astounding purpose had gone grinningly about Marketplace. His engagement of the farm-cart had been widely observed. Even while he gave Old Chairmender his first cheerful greetings small boys raced delightedly for hearing. Now as he argued and cajoled, and as morosely Old Chairmender chewed, the drift of idlers towards the scene formed soon a highly-entertained gallery, its numbers steadily growing. Hot, red, unhappy, Exceat felt something near to exasperation surge within him when Old Chairmender, at long last substituting speech for chewing, disclosed that it was on his original grievance that his mind still was fixed.

"You said a car, 'cos I heard you say a car."

"I know I said a car. There's no —"

"Well, then."

Return to chewing.

By God, thought Exceat, this is awful. These infernal people. That maddening chewing. "Look here, Chairmender," he cried, "I've brought this cart because, as I've told you, there's no car to be had. It's —"

"There's two bleeders," pronounced Old Chairmender, "right there. I got eyes, ain't I?"

"They're both engaged."

"Barstards."

"Well, they may be," said Exceat, tickled despite himself, and, tickled, using the diction of his habit, "for all I know. It's not their fault if they are and it doesn't help us, anyway."

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To laugh at one's own wit, said to be the sign of a fool, may nevertheless be salutary on occasion. A grin at the drollness of this aspersion on and defence of the taxi-drivers' parentage cooled Exceat's cheeks. He put a hand under the sack-swathed elbow. "Come on, old chap." Small boys, delighted at the talkie suddenly becoming a movie, pressed for closer view. Old Chairmender made towards them the menacing step with which often he had threatened their too-close baitings of him. Exceat, tightening his grip and increasing its momentum, kept him on the run thus started. The cart-tail (thank God!) was reached.

But by no means scaled.

Bodily lifting, Exceat immediately saw, was the only means by which possibly his guest could be introduced into the carriage provided for him. With comforting pat on the sack-clothed shoulders, "You wait there," he bade, "just two ticks, old boy," and dashed within the Quaile Arms bar to secure performance of the operation.

Hurried from his beer, but leaving none, the beef-faced carter executed the hoist with the swift ease of one to whom, skilled in forcible use of his vehicle by pig, sheep and calf, the tossing therein of a consignment of venerable bones enclosed in sacking was as nothing. Approaching his passenger all unawares from behind, one ironbound arm at the sack-clothed waist, the other beneath the thighs, had Old Chairmender up in the air, as Tenniel's Alice the Red Queen, before he could expostulate, and down then upon

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the floor of the cart while yet he was snatching for breath with which to record what he thought about it.

Using with simple earnestness the vernacular of an essential impulse of creature life — “— you,” he then recorded.

Not savagely, and by that the more impressively, was it pronounced. As one rendering without heat or prejudice a considered statement of opinion did Old Chairmender, bumped down, thus deliver himself; and when the carter, accustomed no doubt to the disfavour of his charges, with no reply pushed him clear of the tail-board and slammed it home, again “— you,” again unhurried, judicial, simple, earnest, Old Chairmender delivered himself.

Exceat, climbing on a wheel-spoke, looked over genially smiling at him. “All jolly, eh?”

“And you,” spoke Old Chairmender; speaking as before and causing Exceat, so unexpected, so measured, so sublimely ingrate, was the judgement, to drop back to the road consumed with laughter.

In recurrent fits his laughter at the incident served him all the way to Island House and served him well; else had he been acutely self-conscious of the spectacle with which, walking beside his notorious charge, he supplied half Marketplace turned out to watch and to criticize it and all passed on the long stretch home. As it was, shielded by his amusement he went through the ordeal with the assurance given by his mask to a shy man at a bal masqué; and so hopelessly indeed was his sense of the absurd at mercy of the

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incident that from the moment of the arrival in the stable-yard (Charles, hopping, flapping, excitedly welcoming in the entrance) to the last he saw of his uncompromising guest before leaving him, all his engagement with Old Chairmender still was governed by it.

"Fits of the giggles I had pretty well every time he opened his mouth," he afterwards told Clive; and they were provoked by the fact that on the very few occasions on which Old Chairmender did bring himself to speech during the evening, his remarks were in recognizable consonance with the "— you; and you," with which he had expressed thanks for the first offices rendered him towards his change of home.

Assisting him, muttering, out of the cart, "How's that for a snug corner for you sometimes?" Exceat, indicating the bucket-fire famously set ablaze by Charles, had sought to brighten him.

"— it," said Old Chairmender, scarcely looking.

And his first words when introduced to the snug and shining interior prepared for him, permeated by the narcissi bowls, were, after three enormous sniffs, "Wot's that stinkin' in here then?"

Irrepressible giggle caused Exceat to turn abruptly away. Turning back, "Here's tea all ready for you," he announced, indicating the chair at table. "You'll get those sacks off, won't you?"

"Woffer?"

Charles poured tea into a tin mug, plentifully milking

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and sugaring it under direction of Exceat, busy with loaf and corned beef. Old Chairmender with scowl at Charles poured the cup's contents into the tin slop-bowl and taking that in both hands quaffed at it with sounds as of a walrus drinking from a puddle, but with no word.

He was got presently to the armchair before the fire, one of the clays filled for him by his host; and while he sat moodily puffing, the coat, the cardigan, the socks, the slippers and the boots were by turn introduced to his notice.

To the cardigan he condescended "Ah, Army sort; I mind 'em," adding considerably later "— 'em," in application, probably, not to the cardigans but to those who had harassed him when he was served out with one. To the boots he remarked "Ah, with my bleeding corns too." For the other articles of the display he had no word; and Exceat, the boots being exhibited last and their reception threatening renewal of his giggles, thought it then best to leave the old man to his own considerations, which he did, first lighting for him the hanging stable-lantern which had appeared to him to be the safest form of illumination.

"He'll settle down, you know," as they went towards the house, he said to Charles, "bit strange for the poor old chap at first."

Spoken for the purpose of counteracting in Charles any offence against the old man at what must have seemed to him, Exceat thought, a shocking gracelessness, this excuse for Old Chairmender proved to have been unnecessary. No

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outrage of charity had been felt, it appeared, by Charles. Neither tickled nor concerned by Old Chairmender's behaviour, he had displayed himself throughout only as eager to perform his share of the ministrations, and he said now cheerfully, "You bet it is strange. I've been some of those homes and institutions and places for my eyes, and you don't half wish you was dead first time they all come round you fixing you. I know how he's feeling."

Exceat smiled down at him. "I like you, Charles," he said.

At eight o'clock he took up in the billy to the stable a noble ration of the roast beef and its complements which were to be the basis of his own dinner, a large bottle of beer and a generous tot of whiskey. When he entered the harness-room it was to find Old Chairmender still before the fire but with notable alteration of his body's disposition. Left in the comfortable armchair, he sat now on one of the Windsor chairs drawn to the fender. Left reclining, feet outstretched, he hunched now, still in his sacks, on his wooden seat, feet tucked on its top rung. Hands clasped about his knees, gaze dolefully on the fire, head unturned at Exceat's entry, he gave very strongly the forlorn suggestion of one marooned upon a rock, the desolating sea about him.

Very strongly the implication, alike of his choice of seat and of his pose upon it, was that of avoiding contact, even so little as by the soles of his boots, with the unaccustomed fittings about him.

The cheery hail which Exceat had readied in his mouth



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as, laden, he opened the door, took no voice. He was horribly touched.

He set the viands on the table. He went across then and patted the sack-covered shoulder. "Beef, 'taters, cabbage, bottle of beer, double double whiskey. Tuck in, old soldier." Then, with from the old soldier no other than a grunt, he went away. And he felt, as he closed the door, a gaoler.

At eleven o'clock he went up to the stable again, very quietly in at the harness-room door so as not to disturb, he hoped, a sleeper.

The meal, every scrap and drop, had been taken. That was good. But no form was on chair or bed. The room was empty.

"Surely to God," began Exceat's thought, "he hasn't cleared himself off?"

Because it stood ajar, which it had not been, the door leading from the harness-room to the stalls caught his attention. Reswitching the torch with which he had lighted his way from the house he stepped through the door into the stabling.

Heavy breathing . . . In the loose-box.

He put his torch rays through the bars.

On straw taken from packing-cases standing about, covered by the new greatcoat and by two of the blankets, Old Chairmender lay sleeping.

And again, more profoundly even than before, Exceat was horribly touched.

Was the thing, then, a failure? Was it worse: was it, from

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his protégé's point of view, no better than a cruel practical joke? Were the old man's obscene apostrophes from the cart, his indifference to his clothes and to the comforts offered him, far from being funny, the pitiable gestures of a soul so abandoned of the world as to regard its decencies as the dweller among the tombs in the country of the Gadarenes regarded the Christ: "What have I to do with thee? I adjure thee by God that thou torment me not . . ."

These were uncomfortable thoughts for Exceat's pillow, as for his arising in the morning when their embodiments must again be faced and dealt with.

But joy, as has been observed, cometh with the morning, and came.

He was shaving in the washing-room when Charles, with bang for knock, burst in upon him, ecstatic.

"Here, I say, he's fine this morning. Got on that coat, he has, and they socks and boots, and strutting round fit to bust himself. Here, what d'you think though, he's had for breakfast? Five of those eggs, *five*, true as I'm alive, and the finish of the corn-beef, and cocoa 'nuff to drown you. And here, I say, here's the joke of it I've come up to tell you. What d'you think he said to me, then, first thing almost when I see him? 'Who give you them clothes you've got on?' he says. So I tells him you did. So he says, here's the joke of it! 'You've got a bloody good boss,' he says. 'That's what you've got,' he says."

"Charles," said Exceat, beaming out of his lather, "the world's a mighty fine place and life in it is glorious."

## Chapter VII

---

YES, BY GEORGE, often he would tell himself in these days; life was good. Spring was upon the land and in the air, her footprints in the grasses, her fingers in the trees. Youth was in Exceat's heart, zest in his head, renewal in his muscles. He was rising at half-past-six, the sun little ahead of him. He was out on his legs (in those shorts!) for a pipe-opener of his lungs before breakfast, and back with a hunter's appetite. He was working on his soil all morning, pushing his paths and his clearings this way and that through his woodlands, clipping his hedges, repairing his fences, creosoting his sheds, compelling order and signs of care where had been chaos and neglect. What he called tidiness was his aim and his delight: clearing up, hacking down, draining dry. The formal work on flower-beds and borders he left largely to Charles, affectionate cursing of whom was of the morning's established amenities, as cracks with Old Chairmender, warming behind his bucket-fire or in the opposite corner when the sun was kind, were established breaks in whatever he might be doing about the place or throughout the day.

Old Chairmender had taken to washing his face and

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hands every morning *after* his breakfast, an impressive ritual performed, not at the wash-stand, but in the yard, seated on a packing-case before a bucket filled with hot water by Charles. He was going to have a bath one day when the weather got warmer, he had informed Exceat; and at so early as the end of the first week of his occupancy of the harness-room there had been a remarkable occasion on which Charles, bursting up to Exceat in the woodland as if the house was on fire, had given him the news, "Here, what d'you think, he's washing his feet. Come down quick and have a look."

Exceat had not felt tempted; but already when the sack-coverings had been discarded (and burnt) he had noticed with pleased surprise that the ragged clothes beneath were at least not foul, and that evidently the gipsy-kind without the use of soap and water in some mysterious way kept themselves at least not untouchable. Much he looked forward nevertheless to the day of the promised bath; and that not from hygienic motives but as marking an immense step forward in Old Chairmender's rekindling appreciation of life. That was all that Exceat wanted of him. To "reclaim" him from his ways as a sinner is reclaimed from sin was not in his mind. Solely in his mind was that the old man should be happy — if by way of cleanliness and self-respect so much the better. He had a high delight in purchasing terrific pants and other underwear at the working-class outfitters; a high satisfaction in Old Chairmender's lively appreciation of them when shown to him.

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"And the day you have that bath you're going to take, old soldier, they're yours."

"Well, it's bleedin' well," declared Old Chairmender, appreciatively fingering the goods, "going to be worth a bleedin' bath, that's what it's going to be," which was in him what in another would be gratitude expressed in sobs and cries.

For Old Chairmender never said Thank you. All that came at him he took as of right, grumbling shockingly if food or dispositions were not to his taste. But his third-party testimony, "You've got a bloody good boss, that's what you've got," ever was in Exceat's recollection, the lighting of the old man's eyes at his approach a constant reaffirmation of it. Of the happiness of these spring days Old Chairmender was a very considerable part.

His afternoon of this brave period Exceat gave to the Wizard, cyclometer now spaciouly registering in four figures; his evenings to absorption in his revival of his boyhood's indoor pastimes, their entertainment ever increasing as he drew upon them. Stamp-collection, his regular reading of a stamp-collector's journal soon informed him, was far from being but a schoolboy's hobby. Quite obviously men of standing far higher than his own, of intellectuality much superior, pursued it ardently. He bought a new album in which arrangement could be planned on principles and with effects which delighted the orderly habit of his mind. He tore open approval-sheets sent him by post with an excitement comparable with that given him by

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printers' proofs in the early running of the slick pen. In his encyclopædia he followed up history displayed by this stamp or that; in his atlas pursued the geography pointed out for him by another. Often a single stamp taken up with his tweezers and put beneath his magnifying glass at the start of an evening would lose him in its various fascinations until he would exclaim with amazement at the clock's assertion of the hour and sharply pack himself off to bed.

From the *Boy's Own Paper* volumes, too, were feasts in those quiet evenings much beyond his generous anticipation of them. References in the volumes he had brought down with him to features in others which, thus recalled, he remembered, caused him to set old Mr. Allen, the Marketplace second-hand bookseller, in their search, giving him, when they came, the complete range of early issues from the first volume to the tenth. Later numbers he had purchased in monthly parts with his own pocket money. These ten, as he found, were those which had stood in the library of the grammar school which had been his first boarding-school or had been lent him by friends in the holidays; and there were evenings when he was sheerly startled at the degree of his reinvestment by them, as he browsed, in the emotions, guileless, pristine, which in those far days they had aroused in him. As with the two glanced through in his London rooms he had no inclination actually to read the artless matter of the stories. For recapture of the thrills of those — how Gilks cut the rudder-lines in

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the Willoughby boat-race; how the marooned boys first fared on their island; how the Scottish settlers established their home in the Far West — the illustrations sufficed. But the informative and instructive articles, as here and there he clearly recognized them, he sometimes would read, and it was by these that he would find himself transported back to the very surroundings amidst which first they had absorbed him. The accounts of single-handed boat-sailing cruises and of bicycle tours; the "Doings of the Month" which the boy he had been had devoured as though actually he possessed the kennel and the aviary, the chicken-run and the garden whose proper conditioning this serial feature set forth; even the "Answers to Correspondents" in which, to that boy's absorbed edification, a singularly autocratic and un-timeserving editor had hurled the cold tub at his readers as panacea for every ill and foundation of every virtue.

There would come back to Exceat, smiling over these, the very rooms in which he first had read them, the very clothes sometimes that he was wearing at the time, the very incidents experienced before or after or during a particular reading, the faces then about him. Occasions there were, indeed, on which so profoundly, thus reading, was he invested by his boyhood that, astonishing him when he realized it, he would have an impulse, a thought, a reaction belonging to that very boy whom he had been. One such was when as he read he put his hand into his jacket pocket, engaged with it something there and then carried

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it to his mouth. A cigarette touched his lips and he started and looked at it with wonder. And then realized what had happened and gave laugh of incredulity. It was for boyhood's sweets that boyhood's hand actuated by boyhood's occupation had gone to his pocket, had thought to have fumbled, as from a paper bag, from the packet of cigarettes lying there and had conveyed them to boyhood's lips expecting them. In another occurrence he had almost jumped to his feet at an opening of the door. It was Miss Baize, come with an inquiry, but he had thought it to be the grammar-school headmaster's wife coming upon him in her husband's study; and only just in time he had stayed himself from explaining that the head had given him leave to read in here. On a third occasion, opening a cupboard beneath a bookcase he had found himself staring blankly within it wondering what on earth it was that he was looking for and had realized then, with a laugh, that it was a dog-collar. He had been reading in a clearly remembered kennel article that the boy dog-owner should examine from time to time the under side of his pet's collar to see that no stud fastenings were hurtfully jaggging there. When he had first read that his boyhood dog had recently mysteriously died and, much troubled, he had looked, it came back to him, to see if anything had been amiss with its treasured collar, enshrined in a cupboard similarly situated to that before which now he found himself standing.

These were odd tricks, Exceat thought, of whatsoever psychological processes those were which caused them. He



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hailed them as touching most strikingly his belief that the outlived phases of a man's life persist in him, that they lie in his inner consciousness immured but still alive, dormant not dead, capable of release and of active incorporation in the phase of life which has been reached at the hour of their resuscitation.

For not least of Exceat's preoccupations in these good days was his pondering of this theory of his. It was developing. A man's outlived phases, overlaid by those succeeding them, took on, he now was conjecturing, a quality of inertia. Inertia is the state, the condition, in which a body will continue unless that condition is changed by external force. Was he, when he gave himself to the influences of his boyhood, producing that force, causing thereby his boyhood, its inertia touched, to stir? By evidence of those odd throwbacks of his mind when reading those articles, it looked, he told himself, uncommonly like it.

What possibilities were here! Often he had envisaged them. In particular had been that day when, first coming to Island House on that old bike of Harry Hay's assistant, he had conjectured, by the example then experienced, that outlived zests and aptitudes, stored in the subconsciousness, were ready again, in the expression he had used to himself, to garrison and lead the soul. "If I can get at them and let them free," he remembered then dubiously laughing. Was he now discovering a means by which that essential could be contrived? If by giving himself to the influences of his boyhood the inertia into which his boyhood sensibilities

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had passed could be aroused, similarly, surely, by giving himself to influences of other phases of his life the sensibilities of those phases might be released from the inertia into which they too had lapsed?

He would experiment, he decided, choosing for the purpose from among the phases through which he had passed in those years which on that graph of his he had marked "Responsive,"

When all the world was young, lad,  
And all the trees were green;  
And every goose a swan, lad,  
And every lass a queen.

It was by the sensibilities of those "Responsive" years, and of no other, that he desired again to be animated. How precisely to give himself to their influences was the trouble, and he was engaged with this inquiry when he realized one day, with start of surprise, that already, in outstanding measure, those desired sensibilities were his. For he was abundantly happy down here. He was happy, he on this day was telling himself, with a happiness such as he had not known for years; and it was when he realized his use of that comparison that he realized that there was, therefore, occurring within him the very thing to encompass which he was in quest — release of sensibilities belonging to his past, release from his "Responsive" years of the capacity for happiness which in that period abundantly had been his.

Because in what did his happiness down here, "such as he

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had not known for years," consist? It was in the daily spins on the Wizard; it was in the daily besweating of himself with pick and shovel in his grounds; it was in the quiet evenings by which these physical exertions were followed; it was in his interest in Clive, in Charles, in Old Chairmender and in his amelioration of their lots. The delight which he found in these things was, he told himself, a delight out of keeping with his time of life in so far as its provision by what Cray had called his "bucket and spade" amusements were concerned, out of keeping with the self-centredness towards which advancing years tend to gravitate in so far as it was supplied by his giving of himself to the concerns of the three whom his coming to Island House had benefited. They belonged, pleasures of these kinds, to the Exceat of bygone days, of the Responsive days, of the days whose peak was in the days of Jack.

Yes, to the Exceat of those days; and, yes, therefore, he was releasing that Exceat from the place of his immuring; rescuing him from the cell of his imprisonment and bringing him back into the Exceat now in being.

How? Why, surely enough, though he had been doing it unthinkingly, by giving himself to the influences by which that outlived Exceat had been actuated.

And Exceat, on the evening of his debate of this, found himself, to his profound interest, returned to his thoughts of that other evening when almost, but not actually, the pen that should reflect the harvest of his mind had begun to write. On that occasion, "Is happiness, then, life; life hap-

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piness?" he had pondered. On this occasion he was pondering a happiness realized. It was realized, he had secured it, by giving himself to certain influences, and "giving" had been the motif running through those earlier cogitations. "Is, then," those thoughts had run, "giving happiness living; living giving happiness? Is to live to give; to give to live?"

His fingers were on his pen. As on that previous occasion they had contracted upon it with that speculation, so now again they contracted but this time brought it to his paper.

"For what *is* life," he slowly wrote, "but a giving? It is a giving out of life from a fount of life. It is a giving of itself by a universal spirit into other spirits, thereby creating them. It is the active principle of life, the generator of life."

He paused, then added,

"Giving *is* life."

His mind's eyes saw Clive, Old Chairmender, Charles.

He wrote,

"The more I give myself — In the measure that I give myself —"

His mind's eyes saw Jo Pryde.

He put down his pen.

## Chapter VIII

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CHARLES, met coming away from the workroom, told Exceat that he had just taken in tea and that Mr. Shand had finished his writing for the day.

"How do you know?"

"'Cos he was standing up all grinny when I took the tray in, an' grins more when he sees me, an' 'Charles,' he says, 'if ever you've done a job of work good as what I've done today you've earned your tea,' he says. 'I'm through for the day,' he says, 'an' there's two bob for you,' he says."

Charles opened his hand, with cock-eyed delight displaying a florin. He spun it in the air from his thumb, struck it in cock-eyed attempt to catch it, and sent it flying across the hall. "There it's gone, over by you," said Charles, pointing. "Do you expect me to pick it up? Do you know, dash you, that you're supposed to be my manservant in my house?"

"Well, I'll catch it next time, you watch."

Exceat groaned despair and went in to Clive. It was not one of Jo's days.

"Hulloa, Clive; demoralizing my servants with your lordly tips, curse you."

Clive's mouth was full of tea-cake. He looked, as Charles

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had said, all grinny, and, using for Exceat's name the abbreviation instituted by Jo Pryde, grinnily spoke. "I'd demoralize a bench of bishops today, X. I'd set a saint playing quoits with his halo, I feel so mighty pleased with myself."

With wave of a hand towards his table he explained the source of his pleasure; and Exceat cried, "Good hearing. You must be getting near the end, old man?"

Clive nodded, beaming. "Mighty near."

"How much longer?"

Beaming the more, "I'll tell you tomorrow."

"Tell now, man."

"No, tomorrow. I'll tell you this, though, that if I'd been told that day we first met that by today's date I'd have got as far as I have I'd have said it was flat impossible. It's this room; it acts on my brain like an incubator on a clutch of eggs. I'll come up here sometimes, I did last Saturday, for instance — which, by the way, I want to speak to you about — with my thoughts in a knot; and the moment, the very moment, I step in here the knot unravels. It's extraordinary."

"It's not," smiled Exceat, filling a cup. "I knew it for a writer's room the minute I first saw it, and you bet it knew you for the writer the minute it saw you. What were you wanting to say about last Saturday?"

"Why, about the room, as it happens. X, I'm horribly doubtful sometimes that if it wasn't for me you'd use it much more than you profess to want to. Saturday was a

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case in point. When I came in a pipe had just been lit; the fresh smoke was in the air. The *Times* was flattening itself down where obviously it had just been dropped by your chair there, and the chair had just been sat in. It doesn't need a Sherlock Holmes to read a doublequick getaway out of that; you were comfortably in here, you saw me coming and you cleared out."

"What it needs, young feller-me-lad," said Exceat with twinkling relish of his own riposte, "is a thinner skin than yours to be able to realize when someone bolts at sight of you."

"Yes, but bolted," Clive laughed, "on my account, not on your own. That's the point."

Exceat came over to him and with digs of a finger into his shoulder emphasized that which he had to say. "The point is, and whatever else this room does to your head it apparently can't get this into it, that when I'm able to think of you working in here I get a joy into me that beats any pleasure I know. You can't understand it properly. You'll have to wait until you're my age and have a son round about your own, then perhaps you will."

He ruffled Clive's hair and laughed and went over to set his back against the fireplace. "Dammit, that's how I've come to look upon you, Clive; that, and from the angle also of patron of letters which to a man of my turn of mind is a mighty proud position. I believe in your work like hell and all. I never imagined I should have obituary notices when I die, but I'm counting on 'em now because the Press is

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going to say of me, I do believe, that 'it was in Mr. Piers Exceat's house that Mr. Clive Shand, in a room specially set apart for his use, wrote the novel *Magic Casements* which first brought him fame.' "

"What utter — "

"Don't interrupt your patron, dash you. Well, then, how, if I'm lying about the room half-asleep, can I at the same time be outside it and delightedly imagining you in it; and how, if I'm snoring in it, can you be expected to go on opening 'Magic Casements' for a dazzled public? *That's* why, when I see you coming, I bolt. Here endeth the subject and if you feel that you ought to have any gratitude in the matter, kindly express it by going on qualifying me for an obituary notice when I die. That's all *I* ask."

Clive's laugh at this joined with his protest, "What utter — " in stigmatizing as rubbish the notion of his ever conferring lustre on a house or on a patron, but he was gratified by it, Exceat saw. As there is a divine discontent, striving ever for higher attainment, so is there a divine conceit, assured that it will justify itself to whatsoever plane of achievement; and when Exceat saw upon young Shand's face the mark of this fond confidence he was moved suddenly to cast into stronger relief the visions which, as he perceived, he had thrown upon the screen of the young writer's mind.

Bringing seriousness to his tone, "Joking apart, Clive," he said, "I mean it. Believing in you as I do, helping you in the small way I have does positively give me the feeling of



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being a patron of letters. At my age and with my tastes, it's a mighty goodly feeling, let me tell you; and to get the full of my patronage I'd do much more, believe me, than just put a room at your disposal."

This that Exceat thus spoke to young Shand was an assurance. On the morrow it was a warning that he was to find himself moved to give. And as if (as in time to come he was to think) he had then within him a previsioning of that which was to link the two, he added now emphasis to his assurance. Gravely smiling at the mingled gratification and embarrassment upon the other's face, "Remember that I said that," he pronounced, "will you?"

"And now," said he, on the following afternoon, presenting himself in the workroom at Clive's overnight request precisely at five o'clock, "and now how near to the end of *Magic Casements* which you were so mysterious about yesterday?"

He might have guessed the answer. Clive, when he came in, was standing on the hearthrug, in the eye which he put upon Exceat that look which only the young author's eye can hold and only, at that, on the supremest moments of young authorship's career.

"You're never going to tell me —?" Exceat, guessing, cried.

Clive, being guessed, nodded beaming.

"You've finished it?"

More beaming nods; the gestures of emotions of author-

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ship so ecstatic as not to be renderable in human speech; by nods only. And Exceat, for his own expression of the emotions, with swift strides crossed to the dumb transfigured young man and taking both his hands wrung them, first wordlessly, then with "Marvellous, marvellous, marvellous!"

When they had finished these rhapsodies; when young Shand with dramatic finger had pointed to the exact moment on the clock's face at which he had looked up from the final word; when Exceat with proper awe had gazed upon the sheet that held the final word; when the patron of letters had declared that the protégé must come up to dinner that night, even though his employer have to be murdered to contrive it, to float the occasion on a bottle, on a magnum — when these first raptures were at end and the pair were in chairs and with pipes, more soberly debating, Exceat presently said, "And Jo, won't Jo just hug your head off when you tell her?"

He could have sworn when, later in the day, he looked back upon the subject which thus he had opened, that he had raised it with no suspicion whatsoever of where it was to lead him. To introduce Jo's name in this hour of highest happiness of Jo's betrothed was natural to the point of merest conventionality; to present the case between the two as now he proposed to present it was equally matter-of-fact.

And Clive's acceptance of her name showed it to have been in his mind also. His tone and eyes gave the super-

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lative to the expressive diminutive which he used. "She'll be pretty glad," he smiled.

"She'll be crazy." Exceat took his pipe from his mouth and directed it at the other, pinning him to the point he would make. "Clive, why the devil don't you now, at once, take a chance on this new book?"

Clive was at loss. "Take a chance?"

"That girl's eating her heart out for you."

Clive winced. "Oh, that."

"Yes, that. We've discussed it before, and I promised last time that I'd not refer to the subject again at least until you'd finished your book. You've finished it now."

Clive twisted uncomfortable legs. "What did you mean — take a chance?"

"What I'm saying now. Clive, you're going to marry Jo the minute you make success. Take a chance on the success of this book and marry her now, this month, next week."

Clive's mouth shut in a line which Exceat knew. "And if it doesn't," he asked, "make success?"

"I believe in all my bones and with all my literary experience that it will."

"I'm asking, if it doesn't?"

"Old chap, don't be a mule."

Clive made a raw-nerved gesture with his hands. "Exceat, don't — interfere."

"That's not a word," Exceat said gravely, "that goes between us"; and young Shand took him up impulsively.

"You know that I don't mean it, X, in its snarling sense.

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You know — X, you surely to God must know now — that I mean simply that with me this is a matter of principle, not of opinion, and that between a man and his principles there's no room for an outsider, not even for one to whom I owe so much as I owe you."

"I do know and I respect you for it. What I want you to remember, as I've told you before, is that I'm not coming in on the question as an outsider. I'm coming in — as Jo."

Clive gave a pained little laugh. "She doesn't need an advocate."

Exceat put some banter into his tone. "Ah, she'd brief me this time. New facts have just come into my possession, m'lud, and my client isn't yet aware of them. I plead your ludship's indulgence."

"Well, you're indulged," Clive laughed. "But you're nonsuited, remember, before you start."

"We'll see. Listen, Clive. Acting for Jo, it's her love for you, and yours for her, that I ought to put across you, but I'm going to talk to you instead with the voice of common sense, at first at all events. Common sense can mate with principles, can't it?"

"Let's hear it first, then I'll tell you."

Exceat smiled. "You're wise to be cautious because I'm going to dynamite you, so I warn you. Clive, you're going to make good, aren't you; if not with this book, which firmly I believe you will, then with the next?"

"I think so."

"I know it. It's only a question of time, I've often heard

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you say; but on the strength of this evidence here" — Exceat reached out his hand to place it on the manuscript on the table near him — "I'm going to have you change that proviso. When you realize how easily this book has run off your pen because of the sympathetic conditions in which, in here, you have been able to write it, you'll admit, won't you, that your making good is only a question, not so much of time, but of getting the right conditions for your work?"

"Oh, I'll admit that," Clive agreed. "I've always known it. In here, thanks to you, for the first time in my life I've worked in ideal conditions and —"

With a gesture Exceat interrupted him. "You haven't; not entirely ideal; and that's the beginning of my point. You've written *Magic Casements* in conditions which have been ideal *when* you could get to them, *when* you could get away from your secretary-job and give yourself up to what this room gives you. They've not been fully ideal, don't you see, precisely because of those 'whens.' Clive, now that you've realized what a difference ideal conditions, when you can get to them, make to your work, man alive, why not make them your full-time, your resident, your uninterrupted own conditions?"

Young Shand twisted again the uncomfortable legs. "Well, for one thing, because this room which creates them is yours."

"That's shuffling. You could find a hundred other houses, a room as right for you in any of them, once the place was your home."

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"I never could, as a matter of fact. But — "

"Well, damn it, I'll sell you this one."

Clive laughed. "But that's not the point, X."

"No, the point is where I've already made it. The quicker you get ideal conditions for your work the quicker you're going to achieve what your work will bring you. Here's Jo able with her money to produce them for you with herself thrown in, and longing with every breath she draws to do it. For your work's sake, bank on your work, Clive; bank on this book just finished and borrow — I say borrow — Jo's offer."

He paused for answer. Young Shand said, his face twisting, "I do hate this, Exceat."

Exceat bent forward and squeezed his knee. "Well, try this instead. If your publisher, when you hand him this manuscript, offered you five hundred a year on account of future royalties, to be continued indefinitely until your royalties came rolling in to swamp the arrangement — if he offered that would you accept it?"

"Wouldn't I!"

"What about your principles?"

Clive stared. "What would they have to do with it?" He laughed, "You're not premising that my publisher is a woman who would have me marry her into the bargain?"

"No, sir," Exceat smiled. "I don't mean," he explained, "your principles in regard to marriage. You've got others, I suppose, and the ones I'm now crediting you with are

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against contracting an obligation unless you know you can fulfil it."

"Meaning exactly?"

"Why, meaning exactly — would you take on that proposition from your publisher unless your faith in your work were such that you knew you could pay him back?"

"Of course I wouldn't."

"Your faith in your work is such?"

"In the conditions a contract like that would give me I wouldn't have a doubt."

Exceat got up. "Well, Clive, here's Jo for the publisher. What *is* the difference?"

It had been an obvious trap and Clive said so. "I knew, of course, that you were going to spring that."

"'Foiled,' he muttered," said Exceat, and with mock disgust returned himself heavily to his chair.

Clive smiled. "That was why I walked into it so openly — to show you, X, that, to me, there's no parallel at all between the two things. One would be a business proposition — I only wish to God my publisher might see it as such — to which I'd subscribe my end with, with my flag flying. The other would be the kind of thing which, however plausibly it may be presented, I just couldn't do. Don't let's put it as high as a matter of principle, let's call it an idiosyncrasy, a stupid one if you like. That's a thing, isn't it, you can't reasonably explain but you can't get over? Or do I mean an antipathy? Anyway, whatever it is, you know what I mean — some people can't stay in a room with a cat,

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some can't look down from a height. Well, I can't — that's to say I couldn't — apply to my wife every time I wanted my fountain pen mended."

"It's a damn poor fountain pen," said Exceat, "if you can't keep it in repair on the thirty bob a week you've got to your own purse. Damn poor!"

The sound that young Shand gave was but an imitation of amusement; and "But that's a poorer joke," hastened Exceat, "and I apologize for it. I know of course exactly what you mean, Clive; but let me say this — that it's a point of view that belongs to my generation not to yours. In my day marriage was hedged about with as many conventions as a woman was with petticoats. Today girls go about in shorts and trousers and ideas as between the sexes are as free. Take any two young people deeply in love and with enough money between them to make a match of it; will you find anyone of your own age who will say that it matters a rap from whose side the money comes? Put it another way. Take any man supporting his wife whose wife suddenly strikes lucky on her own, scoops an Irish Hospital Sweepstake, or inherits a fortune, or writes a gold-mine play. Is he going to scorn to benefit by it? Is he going to insist on her money being buried away in a napkin because he didn't earn it? What's the difference between such a case and this of yours? Clive, what *right* have you got to insist on Jo keeping her money in a napkin?"

But Clive was not to be shaken. "You've said the whole



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thing," he concluded his rebuttals, "when you've said how my work depends on the conditions I do it in. If I got up every morning with the knowledge that Jo was paying for the roof over my head and the food on my table it would so come between me and my work that my work would suffer in a degree you can't imagine. The thing would be on my mind and when you've got some oppressive thing on your mind you can't work, at least I know that I can't. X, I may be as stupid in this matter as you say I am, but I'm built like that. It's my idiosyncrasy, my streak, my nature, and I can't get away from it. Do, please, drop it."

It was the tinge of petulance in his final words that set up in Exceat's mind the swift flight by association — that magic carpet of the thoughts — which brought him to a bearing of their subject unconceived by him when he had opened it. Clive was sitting in a highbacked, wing-sided armchair. It was covered in a coarse linen shaded between grey and straw. He had pressed himself back into it as he spoke, and his movement, coupling with his framing and with his petulance, gave Exceat, watching him, the association — Achilles sulking in his tent. And immediately, by Achilles in his tent, war; by war, "Lovelace had his war, Lucasta had the waiting"; and the exquisite child face of her who had said it; and that inscrutable look upon her lovely face when she had laid back her head in the car, as this Achilles now his head within his tent. . . .

He said, "Well, I will drop it — with one word more; quite a different one; quite short."

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He began filling a fresh pipe, his eyes as he did so were straight upon young Shand's face; but he said nothing and Clive presently reminded him, "Well?"

"I'm framing it."

When the pipe was filled he got up to take matches from the mantelshelf and lit up his smoke, his eyes still upon the other's face. Then he turned away and began to pace the room.

"It takes some framing," said Clive.

"It does."

Two more turns the length of the room. "I've got it now." He came and stood before young Shand, gravely looking down upon him. "It's taken some time framing, as you've said, because in a way it's rather delicate. I've told you before, haven't I, that in this business I think you ought to consider Jo's point of view?"

Clive who, coming out of his tent during these preliminaries, had extended his legs, now drew them in again. "You have; yes."

"I've told you, in fact, that in a way it's only Jo's point of view that has made me advise you as I do. After all, suppose she wasn't in the picture; suppose you were as badly off in regard to money as you are but *solus*, so to speak. Why, you'd be no worse off, would you, than is the common, indeed the classic plight of young writers who are winning their way. Would you?"

"Not a bit."

"And I'd be offering you nothing more than encourage-

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ment. I'd be telling you, indeed, that when your name is large upon the hoardings and you're fat and prosperous you'll look back on these days of struggle as the happiest of your career. But it's happened that you've involved another career in your career, another life in your life; Jo's life. And therefore when I consider your case I consider hers also; and that is why, and today especially with this new novel for you to square your principles by banking on, I urge you as I do."

The legs which young Shand had drawn in were now squarely beneath him, tucked tight. He glanced at the clock and rose upon them. "If I'm to get down and break it to old Unthank that I want to come back to dinner —"

Exceat had not reached the point of what, from that vision of the occasion of the words "He had his war, she had the waiting," he had set out to say. But he had said the gist of it . . .

He laughed. "You are a mule, you know. Yes, you'd better cut along; and that's your answer, is it, to my elaborately framed appeal?"

Young Shand put out an impulsive hand. "X, you know what my answer is. We've been over it, over this Jo part of it, a dozen times."

Exceat clasped the hand. "Well, let it go," he said and took him to the door.

But at this light dismissal of the subject the minds of both, as it proved, were troubled: Clive's that he had been un-

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gracious, Exceat's that he had shirked an issue. The topic of the celebration dinner took them outside to their parting, then young Shand, suddenly reverting, said, "I didn't mean to seem shutting you up just now about Jo's point of view. You didn't think that, I do hope."

"Not in the 'Oh-cork-it' sense, of course I didn't; but before I'd quite finished, yes."

"Dash my manners. There was something more?"

"There was the delicate part. I hadn't reached it."

"Well, now."

"Well, this." Exceat paused, hesitant; then went on, "Clive," he spoke weightily, "don't run the risk of making Jo tired of waiting."

Young Shand was all gay smile. "Good lord, there's nothing delicate about that. I'd a jolly side sooner you put Jo's point of view that way than your other. That's easy. Jo tire of waiting — man, there's not a chance of it."

He was moving away. Exceat pointed a finger at him. " 'You Have Been Warned.' "

Clive laughed, and waving, went.

Exceat trod slowly back to the house. "But what made me warn him?" was his thought. That Clive had not taken the warning, that he had laughed it away as an absurdity, Exceat made of no account to his self-question. Three hours later, the permission of Professor Unthank obtained, Clive presented himself for dinner. He stayed late. When he had left, still "What made me warn him?" was the occupation of Exceat's mind.

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Throughout the evening the warning had not again been referred to. Exceat had been down to Marketplace on the Wizard for a bottle of champagne. Charles had been so absorbed in watching its opening that he had allowed the whole of the cutlets which he was presenting to avalanche onto Clive's plate.

"On the left side, Charles, dash you; how many times have I told you?"

"Well, I was watching you with that whacking great bottle, see?"

"Well, don't watch — look *out*, you crazy ass!" and the avalanche had followed. The new novel had been duly toasted in the wine, all the meal and all the conversation in the workroom following had been given, when not to discussion actually of *Magic Casements*, to matters cognate, featuring especially Jo; but of "You Have Been Warned" no mention.

Clive on his way down on top, so to say, of the warning, had called in at Doctor Aubyn's to tell Jo the great news of the book's completion but had found her absent on chauffeur duty. He had telephoned from Professor Unthank's and had called in again at the doctor's on his way back to Island House but Jo, the doctor delayed somewhere, had not returned. Exceat, including release from the telephone among the blessings of retired life, was not able to offer that means of communication. The thrill of Jo's thrill to the news must await the morrow.

Her joy in it, though, when she should hear it; the delectable prospects of Clive's home with her should *Magic Case-*

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*ments* make success; discussion of where the home should be (Exceat here a guide-book mine of suggestions); plotting of travel tours the two would make when married — led by Clive all this went famously on those soaring wings which champagne will give even to the driest subjects, much to those luxuriant in the heart. Even were reiterated by Exceat judiciously phrased throwbacks to the advantage of banking on *Magic Casements* and marrying out of hand on Jo's income-on-marriage. But of Jo tiring of indefinite delay no mention. Clive had laughed that out of court when Exceat had introduced it, and outside the evening as a thing that had never been it remained.

Yet present all the time in Exceat's mind his questing of the reason that had caused his warning of it. Why had he done so?

Listening to Clive's ardent chatter of Jo's share in the future brought so near by the completion of his book, it was to Exceat as though there sat with them a third party, one meeting Clive now for the first time, to whom Exceat had hinted that the young man's betrothed might tire of waiting for him and who, hearing now the eager talk, at intervals would question Exceat with his eyes: "What on earth made you think that? What conceivable grounds could you have had for suggesting that a girl, so obviously heart in heart with this young man as she must be, ever would grow chilled in heart towards him?" A wholly baffled third party who, when young Shand had gone, and Exceat returned to the workroom from seeing him off, put

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then the question openly, pressing for answer: "And you say you warned him of it? Incomprehensible. What made you warn him?"

What?

He had based his warning, he declared to himself, on those signs of deferred hope's sickness which Jo had betrayed, on those references to the long waiting which she had made, so far back as on the occasion of their second meeting, that day in the car in the rain, and often since again had evidenced and spoken. But what grounds were they for suggestion of an ultimate lapse of her affection such as was implied by his warning? For what they were worth they were as clear to Clive as to himself, much clearer, because, whereas to himself they were at most but distresses seen in a friend, to Clive they must be poignancies addressed directly to him and for which he was responsible. Yet by Clive with "Jo tire of waiting — man, there's not a chance of it," significance in them had been laughed away.

And what of that other comment which Clive, laughing significance away, had made, "Good lord, there's nothing delicate about that"? Why indeed had he termed his warning a delicate matter? Why conceived it to be of such delicacy as to be broached only with the circumspection, with the elaborate framing, with which he had introduced it? Should there be cause for embarrassment in one of his seniority warning one of Clive's youthful standing that his betrothed might weary of an overlong engagement?

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Seated staring into the fire, Exceat told himself that there should not be.

Why then had he made there be?

He turned his gaze across the room.

Lit now by a single shaded lamp which stood beside him, the room was in deep shadow all about. Only by familiarity could his eyes determine the outlines in the far corner where now they rested; and his vision's concentration upon the amorphous dimness, his mind's engagement upon a speculation similarly nebulous, produced in him gradually (as such conditions will) a manner of self-hypnosis. It appeared to him that through the veiling darkness he was gazing towards great distances. No movement was there, no sound, yet were those remote and secret places invested, he had the feeling, by activities in prosecution of some ill design. Now by the prickings of his senses it was a design directed against himself, now a design in which himself was implicated directed against another. First one, then the other, then the first again; and then, as into a numbed limb returning circulation, a merging into these hidden operations, obscurely revealing them, of the questings of his thoughts.

As if more narrowly he would pierce towards what now was being presented he bent forward in his chair towards the shadowed corner; and he drew a deep breath presently then and turned again to the fire and the lamp as though by their light he would examine that which the eyes of his mind had drawn from the darkness.

He said to himself, "It is because some instinct touching



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her is warning me that I warned him. It was because instinctively I had a sense of some grievous ill threatening not through him or her but through me that I was embarrassed when I spoke my warning."

But on the morrow it was to Jo Pryde that he had to answer the question.

## Chapter IX

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WHAT MADE YOU tell Clive that you thought I might get tired of waiting?"

Exceat, in shorts and shirt, was working when this question was addressed to him in that pit into which he had fallen on the occasion, months before, of Brigadier Sir Marmaduke Eridge's unanswered knocking at his front-door. He had directed Charles that the pit should gradually be filled in by using it as a tip for rubbish and for the debris of all sorts of clearing-up work, and, not having visited it for some time, had come up this morning to see how the filling was getting on.

"Full almost to the top," Charles had informed him, eagerly leaving the path-raking on which he had been employed in order to accompany him to the spot.

"Well trodden down?"

"Well, shoved, you know, with the fork."

"Shoved with the fork! That's what you want whenever you're put to a job, shoving with a fork. Didn't I tell you never to dump a barrow-load without treading it down?" And when they arrived at the pit, "Look at it, just a flop of brambles. My gosh, you are a useless chap, Charles; really you are."

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Charles who never grinned so cheerfully as when being abused, grinned amain. "Well, it's pretty well full all the same to that," he declared.

"Full! How deep do you suppose I'd go if I got in to tread it?"

"Up to your boots, I daresay."

"Up to my neck, I wouldn't mind betting. Here, give me your hand while I try."

Gingerly Exceat had pressed down a foot; it had slid along a bramble branch; his other foot, braced on the pit's edge, had slid with it; Charles had immediately let go his hold, and of his master there was to be seen, within the instant, no more than from the waist upward, fury crowned.

"Why the hell did you let go your hand, dash you?"

"Well, I should ha' come atop of you, if I hadn't."

"Reach down that rake-handle to me."

Guffawing delightedly Charles stepped back for the rake, trod on its upturned teeth causing the shaft to fly up towards him, and engaged then in a complicated catch-as-catch-can with it which ended in the implement of rescue itself shooting into the pit, sharply rapping Exceat's head as it did so.

"There, that's gone in now," Charles announced, guffawing now with sounds as of a donkey in a fit. "Here's a pole to try"; and advancing a long branch towards Exceat, steadily sinking, "You don't half look a scream," he delightedly informed him. "Just your chest sticking up, if only you could see yourself."

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Exceat between his teeth: "I'll brain you when I get out, my boy."

His brains (such as they were, as Exceat would have said) still intact, and devoting them now to a meditation of cigarette-cards while he rested in process of filling a barrow for the pit, Charles an hour later directed Jo Pryde, stepping from her car at the house, where his master might be found. Exceat, thoroughly happy in a tidying job completely to his heart, was treading down a firm foundation in the pit, his shoulders little above its lip, when her bright "Hullo!" greeted him.

He looked up. "Hullo-o!"

"You ought to be in a coat of many colours down there. No, they took that off Joseph before they lowered him in, didn't they? What are you doing down there?"

"Digging through to Australia or filling up a hole — guess which. What are you doing up there, more to the point? Where's your doctor?"

"Gone to town for some meeting. I've got a whole holiday."

"Good girl! I say, have you seen Clive this morning, or heard from him?"

Beamingly she nodded him the silent affirmations reserved for news too good for words. The sun was on her face, a small breeze caressing her garments sculptured her figure; and in that scarcely measurable interval of time between her nods and the words with which then she followed them

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her beauty smote him, looking up at her, as though but then some magic had poised her there and as though, equally by some magic, that which he had known beautiful suddenly was transfigured into a loveliness received not of his eyes alone but of all his pulses. It had happened previously, such moment of her etherealization to him; it was to happen again before their sands had run through the glass of their mingling. Not this once but in a company of occasions, preserved and conned over in his mind as may be pearls upon a string, Exceat suddenly and without apparent reason, never that is to say in precisely the same circumstances, would receive this overwhelming sense of her loveliness. Whether to seek to determine the mystery of the inconsequence of such moments of rapture, or to justify to himself his emotions in them, or to establish them against a future day that might be dubious of them, or haply merely (in the writer's habit) to view them with that closer vision which the pen will give the thought, he once wrote down her beauty as thus he saw it; and the testimony, pertinent to the issues now gathering about these two and desirable therefore in evidence, may be read at this point as usefully as at another.

"I declare solemnly," this writing went, "that when in these sometimes sudden liftings of my eyes I see her face there is about her face and head, so dazzling is her beauty, an aureole, a nimbus. I declare that her loveliness is done in gold not of man's refining but of celestial, so that it throws off a radiance, an aura, an emanation . . . It is the face,

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when I see it thus, of a child, having in perfection those attributes which only a child's face has: when in thoughtfulness wiser than a Solomon's because informed, not with knowledge of the subjects of its pondering, but with wonder that such things should be; when in mirth more joyous than any joy ever to be seen on older faces, howsoever uplifted, because derived, not of escape from restraint, but of innocence that restraint exists. I think that a child's face is as near as a man may see to the faces of the angels of God, which are imprinted of God's face. And that is very near. And that have I seen when I see hers."

And seeing her thus, looking up at her from the pit while she nodded down to him, he knew himself glad that it was her turn, not his, to speak.

"Clive came down this morning," she said, "before breakfast."

"I bet he did. He was fairly bursting with the news for you last night; I doubt he slept."

She laughed. "It's magnificent, isn't it, the book finished so quickly? It's your room, he declares, that did the trick. What made you tell him that you thought I might get tired of waiting?"

As a child's too, he often thought, the disconcerting trick she had of changing without change of tone from the apparent midst of one subject to what should have been the first cautiously introduced midst of another; and not for the first time in their conversations he made playful reproof

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of her habit the excuse for delay in answering her. "You don't jump about, do you?" he laughed; and then, "I want notice of that question."

"Well, you can have it while you're coming up; you are coming, I suppose, as I've paid a special call on you? How do you get out?"

Scrambling up in the first instance by the aid which he had proposed to brain when reached, he had then carried a rope round a tree, bringing its end back with him into the pit. Pointing to it now, "That long brown thing," he said elaborately, "is called a rope, and it's used quite often for haulage purposes. You catch hold of it like this, lie back on it in this way, and" — he suited now each word to the action — "come — up — on — it — hand — over — hand — like" — and he stepped up beside her — "this."

She was laughing, but her look also was approving him. "Well, you do it jolly nimbly," she declared. "I'll say that for you."

"I'll say for myself," said Exceat, dusting his hands and blowing a bit, for the pull, though short, was awkwardly steep, "that the younger I get the older I know myself to be."

Her brows wrinkled puzzlement. "Sounds like a cross-word clue."

"Well, it means that the more down here in Quaille I do things that Clive for instance could do with one hand tied behind his back, the more I realize how dashed hard I find it to do them. That's age, my girl."

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Her eyes read him head to foot in his shorts and shirt. "Oh, you're young enough," she said. "You're younger than Clive in some ways, I often think."

"I'd be thrilled to know just one."

"He's more serious, often."

Exceat gestured disparagement. "Oh, that! If only you could have said he'd not have done that rope trick so featly —"

She laughed at the archaism. "There you are — featly. Clive would never have said that."

"If all I've got it over Clive," said Exceat ponderously, "is that I use a word which his literary sense would prevent him from using, it's nothing, as between two literary gents, for one of 'em to be proud of. If Clive's more serious it's because he's got responsibilities while I, thank God, have shed all mine. He hasn't got time to play the fool; I've got all the time there is. And there's no fool, you may have heard, like an old fool."

And with her staggering inconsequence her reply was, fixing him with her eyes:

"What made you tell him that you thought I might get tired of waiting?"

Unable on that challenge to hold her look, he turned away his own to where his jacket lay a few feet from them. "I'll tell you," he said and went to take the jacket up; and smiling at her then across the distance now between them, and adding further to the lightness of his reply by speaking it while hunching on his coat, "I said that to him," he



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answered, "because there's no fool, as I've just told you, like an old fool."

She had been toying with a twig and she threw it at him in mock disgust. "That's like 'I'll tell you a story' and then going on with 'About Jack a Nory.' It doesn't tell anything."

He laughed. "It tells everything," he declared. "My warning to Clive was the warning that any old maid would give any young man who kept lengthening out his engagement to a girl. Let Clive ask a dozen of 'em and see."

She said slowly, "Well, I believe that you meant more than that."

Her voice had changed from gay to measured and with it he saw that her look had changed. There stood in her eyes again that regard of which he had written "What is in her mind when she looks at me like that?" And because he had indeed meant more he felt his eyelids flicker; and perceived then (as he thought) a minutest tremor in the steadiness of her gaze; and in dismay at what further emotions, should this juncture be prolonged, might be exposed, went for relief to the diction of cheap fun.

"You're probably right," he declared. "I've got such a brain, you know, that often I throw off things like that without realizing how profound they are. I'll have a think at it, and if I find it did mean any more I'll tell you." He changed his tone to a brisk purposefulness. "Now what's the programme? How long —"

Her smiles had accepted his removal of whatever tense-

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ness herself may have experienced. "Clive's coming here for me at twelve," she answered him. "He's getting the day off too and we're going to spend it marvellously in the car together. I've got" — she looked at her watch — "about three quarters of an hour — "

"Well, a spot of coffee or something down at the house?"

"No, I'm not a coffee-fiend. I'd rather stay out here."

"Ah, tell you what, try being a cocoa-fiend. Old Chairmender does a cocoa-brew for himself and Charles about this time on that bucket-fire of his. It's rather fun tin-mugging in with them."

She was amused but shook her head. "I'd rather prow! about up here. How is Old Chairmender?"

"He's marvellous. People who knew him down in Marketplace wouldn't recognize the old sinner. He's going to have a complete bath any day now. Charles can hardly contain himself looking forward to it; nor I, for that matter. We've got a huge wooden tub, and Charles and I are going to hop round with towels and things; it's going to be a tremendous show. Prow! this way, shall we?"

She walked beside him. "Yes, I want to prow! all round. Old Chairmender in a wooden tub!" She was laughing at his description. "Yes, marvellous. But I think it's you that's rather marvellous, you know. What makes you do these things, for Charles and for Old Chairmender I mean, in the first place?"

"Why, as to Old Chairmender, to get him clean, of course. What else do you wash for?"

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"Funny! I said in the first place. I saw Old Chairmender the other day, all spruced up in new clothes, taking in some logs for Miss Baize, and honestly I didn't know him. I didn't at first believe it when Clive said it was he, that sodden awfulness as he used to be outside the Quaile Arms. And then Charles. He came to our surgery once or twice before you came here, a cross between a scarecrow and a village idiot — and now, in that pantry jacket serving our tea!"

"He's still the village idiot, believe me."

"He adores you."

Exceat laughed.

"Oh, that's pretty good! He regards me, as a matter of fact, as a cross between an almighty joke and an almighty thunderstorm, mostly the former."

Jo would not accept that.

"If you'd seen his eyes following you as I've seen them you'd think differently. But you don't answer my question; you never do, I'm beginning to think. What made you help these two, I asked you, in the first place, originally?"

"Why, for the fun of it, I suppose," Exceat told her. "Each of them was a mess in his own way, and I adore tidying up a mess; when I see one I can't rest till I've got at it and put it in order."

She shook her head. "No, there's more in it than that. Some people in to tea at the doctor's the other day were saying that you'd been seen helping women and errand-boys to shove their prams and their bikes up Furlong Hill;

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not one pram or one bike but several times. Do you call that tidying?"

He laughed. "No, I call that tracing."

"Tracing?"

"That's what I said. When I was a boy — about twenty years before you were born, that's to say — some society or other, Dumb Friends' League or some such, used to stand a great trace-horse, as it was called, at the foot of steep hills to help up heavy loads. Wimbledon Hill was one place and Highgate Hill another and there was one at a big hill where my home was. I used to love watching the splendid chap hitched up to a cart and help haul it."

"Well?" (for he had stopped).

"Well, down here I often amuse myself by pretending that I'm a boy again, see?"

"Not a bit; you weren't a trace-horse when you were a boy."

He had picked up a fallen stick and he playfully raised it at her. "Don't be so dense. You know perfectly well what I mean. I see a woman with a pram or an errand-boy with a delivery-bike toiling up Furlong Hill, and I remember the good old horse days, and it amuses me to do a bit of tracing just as I used to delight in seeing it done."

"Amuses you to go up and down several times doing it?"

"Well, if I'd nothing better to do, and you must remember that down here I'm the World's Worst Idler, I daresay I might. I've only done it, of course, when I've

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happened to be going up the hill and have overtaken a fagged pusher."

"You couldn't just happen to be going up again immediately you'd once reached the top. Several times up and down what those people said."

"A market-day I expect. On market-days there's a stream of countrywomen toiling up with the kid in the pram buried in parcels; and I have, once or twice, had a bit of fun that way for an hour."

"Bit of fun! You make out you do things like that, and for Old Chairmender and Charles, just for fun."

"Well, so I do. Would I do it, do you suppose, if it wasn't? What did your friends think? that I was mad? I've seen people stare."

She gave a jerk of her head. "They're not friends of mine." She paused. "They said some rather beastly things, matter of fact."

He laughed delightedly. "Bless 'em, I'd love to have heard." The path up the woodland which they had been following took here a bend and he pointed with his stick to the pond thus brought into sudden view. "Look, now, there's a bit of tidying for you. This spot was just about *the* abomination of desolation when I first got to work on it. You couldn't see water for weeds and all around was just jungle. That's what I call tidying, *and* tracing, by Jove, the barrowloads I've shoved up and down while doing it. Praise it; I'm proud of this."

Certainly he had made here a delightful pleasance, and Jo

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Pryde said so. The pond's banks were gay with irises; brush-wood had been cut back for some distance among the trees; a rustic seat looked down above a point at which logs had been laid in semblance of a landing-stage. "It's a picture," Jo Pryde concluded. "What's that in the middle out there, a raft?"

"I'd say it is, a beauty; *Swiss Family Robinson* design if you remember the pictures of their raft with tubs just like that for lockers."

"Ripping; how do you get out to it?"

"Ah, that's that incredible fool Charles. He went out on it by himself the other day and of course when in the exact centre must needs fall in — yelled, and fortunately I heard and came rushing down to go in for him."

"Goodness! Was he drowning?"

"Not so as to provide me with a heroic swim and rescue act, I'm afraid. There's not more than five foot of water at deepest, but he'd drown himself, Charles would, in a font if he was left to it. I just floundered in, cursing him with curses that might have licked up the water like the flames around the sacrifice staged for those Baal chaps, and was so damn furious hounding him back to get changed that I quite forgot to bring in the raft."

In her laughter "You'll have to make him wade in for it," she said.

"Oh, quite useless, he'd get a chill or cut his foot off on a bottle or something; you've no idea what a chap he is. No, I'll have to strip to it and he'll hop about on the

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bank enjoying it like a film. What about a sit on that seat?"

"No, let's go on exploring. Imagine saying that all you do for Charles is done for fun!"

"I wasn't including that loathsome plunge into the pond with all my clothes on, if that's what you mean. We'll go this way now; and by the way, the lay-out here, if you ever refer to it, isn't called the pond, please; it's the lagoon."

"Jolly," she cried. "The lagoon — I approve that."

"You wouldn't if you knew what a lagoon actually is, because an inland pond emphatically is not one. But you know, don't you, how places name themselves sometimes?"

"Oh, absolutely," she agreed. "They sort of jump a name at you the minute you see them and you couldn't call them other if you had to go to the stake for it."

He looked at her very appreciatively. "You and I —" he began; then stopped himself. "That's it, jump their names at you. Look, you see that tree over there where those stumps are, the big chap with the gash in him?"

"Yes, you're felling it?"

"We're trying to, Charles and I. We got down those other two for our fire-log stack, both of them needing the axe before a gale brought them down on, for certain, Charles's head; and then started on that one, but it's absolute granite. I've been at him Lord knows how often with my little George Washington — that's what my felling-axe called itself, by the way, the first time I used it — and we've had the saw jammed in him half-a-dozen

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times but as for any effect further than the nibble you can see . . . Well, what do you think *he's* called himself, grinning at me?"

She put her head on one side, debating; and watching her he knew afresh that there was not a poise of hers but gave him her loveliness from some new, lovely angle. "Ironsides," she guessed.

"No, though he might have. No, he's Public Enemy No. 1."

"Oh, delightful," she cried. "Tell me some others."

"As we come to them. That pit you found me in is Man Trap; that was obvious; I could have told it that myself the day I first fell into the infernal thing. This rather jolly place we're coming to now, this big flat bank against the boundary wall with kind of turrets fronting it — see? — is the Bastille."

"Oh, perfect for it!"; and as they ascended to this limit of the grounds of Island House and came upon the well-hemmed plateau, "Oh, but I love your Bastille," she cried; "and what a view from it!"

His eyes were for his view of her — again a new and lovely poise — upon it; but he assented "Yes, it's a good spot. I sit up here quite a lot, thinking."

"Let's sit now." She brought her gaze from the prospect to his face. "What do you think about?" she asked him.

"Oh, things."

She turned away and drawing her skirts beneath her sat where she had stood, on the plateau's edge. To her



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right, a little behind her, was a low mound of the sward and he took that. Their view, as thus they rested, was over the woodland and the house, across the roofs of Quaile, threads of chimney-smoke climbing the still air, to the hills beyond; and she spoke presently towards it, not turning her head, and taking up his "Oh, things" as if no interval had followed his reply to her inquiry as to the subjects of his thinking.

"Jack, ever?" she questioned.

He had told her and Clive of his brief life with Jack; yet the question, arising from no context, belonging indeed to a single evening many weeks remote, should have surprised him; yet did not, and he answered it evenly, as she had asked it, towards the distance.

"No, not Jack up here that I can remember."

"I was interested in what you told us that evening about your dreams of her."

"Yes, I remember you were."

She turned towards him. "Did I say so? I don't remember."

He accepted her eyes. "No, I saw it in your face."

She resumed her forward gaze; and after a further silence addressed again the distance. "Have you dreamt of her, in the way you said, lately?"

"No, I haven't."

"I'd like you to."

This did surprise him. "Why on earth — ?"

But she gave no recognition of having caused surprise.

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Addressing still the distance, speaking still as if voicing meditations rather than conversing: "Well, I think it's rather nice," she said, "her keeping touch with you like that."

His eyes now were brought from the view to her person. She wore no hat. His eyes now were upon the fine gold of her hair and on the pale cream line of her neck below it. He made no comment on her words.

"Where is she now," her tones meditated, "do you suppose? Do you ever wonder about things like that?"

Eyes still on her hair and nape. "Sometimes," he said.

Gaze still on the prospect before her, tones meditative still, "I often do," her voice came. "Watching you here, would you think she might be?"

He gave the sound of a laugh. "No, I doubt that; she'd have better things than that to do, I'd imagine."

"Well, where?"

He was seized of an impulse, almost incontrollable, to put out his hand to lay it on her head. He said very gently, rather as if his voice made consonance with the gentleness of the action he had almost performed:

"No motion has she now, no force;  
She neither hears nor sees . . ."

Swiftly she turned her face to him. "You're quoting something?"

He smiled at her. "Don't you know it?"

She shook her head, "No."

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"You should; it's Wordsworth; you can't possibly afford not to know the whole of Wordsworth."

"Well, tell me it."

Her face was turned up to him, exquisite (he thought it) as a child's when pleading to be told.

And gravely smiling down upon it, "Well, it rather fits your 'Where is she?' " he said; "and rather fits, you'll think, her visits in dreams which you say you like. It goes, only eight lines of it:

"A slumber did my spirit seal;  
I had no human fears:  
She seemed a thing that could not feel  
The touch of earthly years.

No motion has she now, no force;  
She neither hears nor sees,  
Rolled round in earth's diurnal course,  
With rocks, and stones, and trees."

Her lips had parted as she listened; but with the penultimate line they touched together again, and at the ultimate: "Oh, but poor Jack!" she cried; "I couldn't bear to think of her like that."

Comical shock sprang on Exceat's face. "Dash it, you mustn't," he exclaimed, "take it too literally; not as bowling over and over in an avalanche."

A spell, gradually developing, had held them. By the ludicrous picture of his protesting words they were caught in it as giggles will catch constraint in church. And sud-

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denly they were laughing helplessly, peal on peal; and the spell, grotesquely shattered, was gone.

"We'd better go down to Clive," said Exceat, presently controlling himself, "it's about time if he said twelve."

"For goodness' sake!" declared Jo Pryde, wiping her eyes; and sobering they descended from the Bastille.

"My grumble, you know," she chatted as, still with occasional spurt of laughter, they went down the woodland, "is why you've never taken me up there before, or round all this at all for that matter. You showed us both around the first day I started coming up to Clive in your room, when the whole place was a cross between a wilderness and a quagmire; and today, if you'll believe me, is the first time since so far as I'm concerned. Why haven't you?"

He answered her in her own measure. Later was to come to him self-set interrogatory touching the spell riotous escape from which had been given him by intrusion of the grotesque; now, riotously escaped, it was forgotten of him as the constraint of the class-room by the urchin bursting out from school. Her brisk chatter, her audacious toning of her question, restored her to the vivid limb of his first meeting with her; and taking his cue from her, "Because I haven't wanted you," he laughed. "Your standing invitation is to the house to be with Clive, not up here interfering with me."

"Imagine," cried she, "that I'm sticking out my tongue at you, will you?"

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"Easily; it's just about your style; how Clive puts up with you sometimes — But listen, Jo, by the way, about Clive. We've wasted all the morning over your nonsensical questions about Charles and pushing prams and poor Jack and all that rot, and haven't above two minutes now before we run into him. Slow up a bit, shall we, because I want to tell you that I was at him hard yesterday afternoon and last night persuading him to do now, and with no more waiting, you know what."

"You were?"

Her tone was that of a quick delight. Freed by their uncontrolled laughter from whatever influences might have caused her preoccupation on the Bastille, she was returned, he saw, to her heart's interest as a child from disquieting element to its favourite toy; and pleurably, as one delighting in the child's return to happiness, he pressed it on her. "You bet I was," he declared. "I promised you long ago that I would whenever I could, and I've done it often. But yesterday, with his book just finished, was a chance as never before, and I want to suggest to you to take the chance as I took it."

"Yes; tell me."

"Why, I urged him, and you must urge him, to bank on *Magic Casements*."

"To bank on it?"

"I mean to hand it to these principles of his as security, so to speak, against his breaking of them by marrying you now on your income. He marries you, see? now while

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*Casements* is awaiting publication; and it's published and is the huge success we all know it will be; and he shakes his bulging pass-book in his principles' face and says to 'em, 'There you are, boys. What did I promise you?' See?"

She struck her hands together. "Oh, rather! Oh, jolly well put!"

Smiling at her enthusiasm, "Not too badly," he admitted; "better in fact than I actually expressed it to him yesterday."

"Marvellous, I think. How did he take it?"

"Well, I can say this much — that at dinner he talked tremendously of plans, of where your home together should be — of travel ideas, and all that."

"He did?"

"You should have heard him. Plans brought within his view, mind you, by his hopes of success this time, not by expressed intention of taking up my scheme and marrying you tomorrow — I'm not saying that. But don't you see the higher his hopes are the better, you can urge him, his security is. See?"

"You bet I do." Her eyes were sparking. She turned them from him towards where Clive would be approaching. "Oh, if he will!" she cried; and then, "Look, there he is!"; and, waving, "Oh, hulloa, Clive!"

They had come to the trees flanking the entrance-drive; Clive, espying them, hastening up it. She gave Exceat an impulsive hand, "Thanks most awfully. It's a wizard idea"; and she stepped out quickly then onto the drive to young Shand, and in a moment into a bear-hug such as probably

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only young authors, supercharged with the joint transports of a new book finished and a day with their loved one begun, can give.

Which watching —

“Yes, you’ve been separated, good God, ever since three hours ago,” said Exceat.

Laughing, they disengaged their embrace. With laugh and chaff the three moved up to where Jo had left the car standing by the house; and presently the two — Clive voting for no waste of precious time on offered refreshment — were in and slowly moving off, all three smiling, waving.

And now the car was at the bend; and now, last wave through her window from Jo, was gone.

And now the farewell smile had passed from Exceat’s face, replaced, as motionless he left his gaze upon the point to which it had been carried, by figuration of profoundest depth of troubled thought.

Why, she had asked him, had he never before taken her, as today, over the sights of his grounds? Why, when he caught her gaze upon him, he had inquired of himself that night when he wrote of Old Chairmender in the workroom, did he blankly meet it and blankly turn his eyes away? Why, he had desired of himself to be informed, had he spoken to Clive, with so great circumspection, that warning that she might tire of waiting?

In spirit he sat again upon the Bastille, her figure, the gold of her hair and the cream line of her neck below her hair within touch of his hand, and knew the answer to his

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whys; and, knowing it, knew too a great dismay. This day he had permitted himself her private company and it had seduced him, Good God, to that impulse to put out his hand and lay it on her head. In intention if not in fact his hand had actually caressed her. In intention if not in act he had expressed towards her, Good God, the emotions by which the impulse was dictated.

Dismayed, he drew in a deep breath. Aghast, he pronounced then to himself the answer to the questions with which he had taxed himself.

“Good God,” his pronouncement was, “I am in love with her.” And then, “— With this child, with this boy’s betrothed, Good God!”



PART FOUR

He Finds



# Chapter I

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MAGIC CASEMENTS was published in early September. By November such demand for it as there had ever been had ceased. By Christmas it was not to be found either in the publishers' announcements or in the bookshops. In the spring the three who were poignantly concerned, each from own angle, in its commercial fortunes knew definitely that it failed. Proof of failure was not required, but on the afternoon of Clive's receipt of his royalty account he brought up proof to Exceat, tossing down the statement of sales with something of that savage satisfaction in which, when we have been bidden hope against hope, often we will turn upon our encouragers.

With bitter laugh, "There you are," he announced. "There's for your 'You wait a bit, my boy'"; and while Exceat conned the figures, £51.3.4, "Well, thank God I didn't bank on it as you and Jo suggested," he went on; "that's one thing to be grateful for," and mocked his bitterness again.

Exceat put down the paper. "Remember those full column notices in the *Times Literary Supplement* and the *Manchester Guardian*," he said, "and that twelve-page

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article in the *Forward Review* making *Magic Casements* the peg for an estimate of all your work."

"To hell with them," cried young Shand, and went to stare bleakly from the workroom side window, hands deep in pockets, shoulders hunched.

Exceat had been sitting at his table when Clive came in. He had turned his chair towards him while thus briefly they spoke. He sat now with his eyes upon the intractable and disconsolate back presented to him yet seeing it only as is watched a lowering sky by one whose heart's concern is on the distant fell.

In such a one it is the mind's vision that is filled not the material eyes. The object, not the baleful engine, of the threat is seen; and the eyes of Exceat's mind, watching Clive, saw Jo, her situation in this pass. He saw her face. In the nine months which had elapsed since that day of his aghast discovery to himself that she was loved of him her aspect had grown older; if such a word as ageing could be applied to virginity such as hers she had aged. She was something quieter in her manner, a shade pale, a little thin. Vivid had been, and was, the quality alike of her air and of her beauty; but she was a shade less vivid. What wonder? Exceat, noting it, would ask himself. For years now she had been eating out her heart. With each new book of Clive's her hope, her heart, had surged; and hope has this infirmity that with each ebbing of a surge the fount diminishes; less heart remains to eat; the spirit, on short rations, tends to fade.

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*Magic Casements* had caused a surging of hope higher than any tide before. It had been the first book whose writing Jo had attended. Clive and she had been in one another's neighbourhood during all its composition; thanks to the freedom of Island House they had been actually together during the greater part of its progress. Hand in hand as it were she had seen the fitting out and then the launching of this ship, cheek to his cheek had watched the horizon for topsails of the argosy as which it should come home. And there had filled her additionally this time the hope with every morning that Clive would agree, as she had joined Exceat in urging on him, to bank on this enterprise and mate her before its outcome stood declared. Almost he had consented. As one stirred with wine will consider chances not contemplated when in normal blood, so, in the car that day, and on days following, flushed with the transports of his own hopes, "Well, well," she had reported him to Exceat as saying, "I'll think about it; I really seriously will. Just wait a bit until I hear what Hobson [his publisher] thinks of it."

"Oh, Clive; oh, Clive."

And then, "Well, wait just until it's actually out before I decide. Let's see, first, what the critics are going to say about it."

And still, ardently as before, believing yet in the almost impossible to believe, still "Oh, Clive; oh, Clive."

These were heights of hope never before reached. Corresponding in their desolation were the depths into which,

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denied attainment of her hopes, she fell. The libraries and the booksellers subscribed no better than perfunctorily for the book: it did not "go off." The public, whether or not they read the high opinions of the critics, gave no endorsement to the views: the sales hung fire. The autumn avalanche of fiction, swollen with unusual weight of best-sellers, poured down upon the shelves of the trade and the fancies of the readers: *Magic Casements* was swept away and buried. And as these successive reports were brought by Clive, gloomy-browed and gloomier yet, Jo's "Oh, Clive. Oh, Clive," which had been ecstatic, now was pleading, then, irritably rebuked, was silenced.

Exceat overheard the occasion of its silencing. On a November Friday, Jo's day, he was about to enter the workroom to tea, by arranging with the pair when Clive's voice, querulously raised, came to him on the threshold. "Oh, drop that, Jo, for goodness' sake. Haven't I got enough to put up with?"

Impelled to move away, a dislike that he had of secret possession of knowledge not intended to be his caused him to present himself that they might guess or suspect that he had heard. He stepped into the silence which his opening of the door had brought and said cheerfully, "Now then, children, quarrelling, quarrelling."

Clive gave embarrassment's awkward laugh. He was standing on the hearthrug, Jo moving away up from him up the room. "Oh, just argifying," Clive said.

"Thought I heard blows."

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"Only," said Jo and blew her nose, "this sort."

Her back was to them and she turned now smiling. "I've got a brute of a cold."

"Yes, it's in your eyes," Exceat told her. While she had walked away he had seen her handkerchief at her face before, in order to account for it, she had used it conventionally. She was distressed. He wanted to help her.

She dabbed at her eyes. "Yes, cataracts," she smiled, "hence as we say in the profession, catarrh; and poor Clive's got the hump, so we were, perhaps, a bit wordy."

"Well, hard words," said Exceat, lifting a cover, "butter no parsnips; let's hope they spread themselves on tea-cake."

In this cheap little jest something of the badinage which invariably arose when the three were together was set in motion. Clive addressed himself mostly to Exceat, though; something of whatever discomfort had been between him and Jo hung in the air; and Jo, when she was leaving, made reference to it. Her doctor's and her own afternoon off was to be curtailed by the claims of a patient and to pick up her employer at the golf club-house she left early. Clive was knotted over a crossword puzzle. Exceat went to the door with her and outside to the car.

When they were out, "That was clever of you," she said, "to pretend that you thought my cold had got into my eyes."

"It disturbed me to see you have to pretend that you had a cold. You'd been crying."

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She blinked. "Oh, just one of those absurd chokes that one gets sometimes, not really crying."

He said gravely, "Why does one get them?"

To his concern she looked suddenly to be upon the point of getting one now. She turned away and made to open the car door.

"Clive thinks the book has failed, of course," Exceat told her. "He's taking it mighty hard and naturally he's a bit touchy."

She slid herself into her seat and pulled to the door. "Well, good-bye," she said.

He reached in his hand to her shoulder to detain her. "Jo, you're taking it hard, too. Don't think I don't know that."

She said, "No, I'm just —" She made with her left hand a little motion of emptiness and repeated her floating adjective "— just"; and she smiled palely and caused the car to take movement, leaving him.

It was from that day that he began to notice a flagging in her. With that overheard "Haven't I got enough to put up with?" he knew that Clive had announced himself to Jo as withdrawn into the activities of his own troubles; with that sad little gesture of her hand, Jo, he knew, realized herself abandoned to the forlornness of her waiting.

The *activities* of Clive's troubles. That was the point which Exceat, watching, stressed to himself. Clive had his war. He had suffered reverse in it, but the very fact of defeat, the very wounds he had received, gave his mind



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occupation. At worst he had something to kick against, the fates to revile, the heavens to call to witness the injustice done him by the public taste; at best the ashes he carried in his bosom were those of a phoenix which, even while the ashes were gritting in his teeth, already by this November of his petulant outburst his creative impulses were feathering to soar aloft anew. "Haven't I got enough to put up with?" Exceat thought that the expostulation, common of hearing in the nerve-strain of this modern age, was modern rendering of "Am I my brother's keeper?" Too often the expostulator's hands are stained with the tears, if not the blood, of a victim of his engrossment in his own injuries, and here most lamentably was such a case. Clive was ready enough for Jo's sympathies when these touched their mutual disappointment from his view of it; he appeared to have none himself to give to her own suffering in their mutual case. He was far from neglecting Jo in her person and in her offer of the order of sympathy which was acceptable to him; but he neglected her in her heart and neglect is a sure killing.

And that had been back in November.

Clive turned abruptly from the window at which he had been brooding. "Sorry I'm so sore. I'm getting over it really but that cursed royalty-statement, showing me where I belong in black and white, has put it on the map pretty badly. I'll go up the grounds, I think."

Exceat reached out a sympathetic grasp, giving and re-

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ceiving a warm pressure as, moving to the door, Clive passed him. Offering the publisher's note with his other hand, "You'll be framing it one day," he smiled; "a show-piece on your study wall. Here, take it, won't you?"

Clive at the door said bitterly, "It'll be yellow with age time I'm likely to frame it. Let Jo see it, will you, and tell her I'm not fit for company. She said she might be coming up today."

"It will pain her," Exceat said, not smiling now.

Clive gave a hard laugh. "Not as it pains me."

He was gone. Exceat turned about in his chair and with slow repressed beats drummed the heel of his hand against the table-edge before him. In that hard "Not as it pains me" the hopelessness into which Jo was abandoned by Clive's inability to measure the angle of her portion in this matter was presented precisely as he had been reviewing it a moment before. She was condemned anew to do her waiting while Clive was at his war. Caparisoned always in his armour, Clive had become since his defeat a restless, jangling presence up and down the corridors of her mind; and in this new extension of her sentence, imposed now with newly desolating terms, it had befallen, Exceat since some long time now had had the fear, that in her repinement she was finding a relief (no higher to call it) in his own companionship.

It was a fear both sweet and terrible, terrible because sweet; and it had been words of hers, spoken to him one January afternoon when they were alone together in the

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workroom waiting Clive, which, when he had examined their bearing, first had caused it in him.

"It's quiet here with you."

A considerable silence between them had prefaced the words, a silence as prolonged had followed their utterance. Nothing that had been said had led to them. Little more than audibly, with the tone as of a sigh, softly she had projected them upon the dusk gathering about the room; and through the medium of their suggestion, making no answer, he had studied her, lying back there in a deep chair, her face in shadow; and reading her had felt his sweet and terrible dismay.

In an affection between two of equal standing neither can say why he or she is liked of the other. To seek to do so beyond such generalization as a similarity of tastes would be indeed an odious conceit. "He likes me because I am this and this." Such examination and, much more, such answers, are, between compeers, unthinkable. But because Jo Pryde was her age and Exceat his, because he thought of her as a child, he had studied her, lying there in her chair, eyes half-closed, and had read what sustenance she received of him, as might a physician studying his patient, ponder the reactions to his drugs.

"It's quiet here with you." In that statement of her feelings in his company (patient's report on effects of medicine) as plainly as if she had told him he had known that in the portion which now was hers — in her reimposed waiting, in her distresses by the jangling armour of Clive's

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moods — she found in him a quality of, so to call it, rest, shelter, such as with sigh of relief is found in the lee of a rock by one much wearied by buffeting winds across a moor; a quality of stability such as with relief is found in firm foothold by feet dismayed in marsh or quicksand; a quality of permanence such as with relief is found in settled home by one continuously at mercy of alien roofs. Aware that she never knew, nowadays, in what mood she would find Clive, nor what demands for what order of sympathy would be made of her, he had discerned that she found in himself an unvarying quality of acceptance of her, whatsoever her own moods, calling for nothing from her, taxing her spirit in no degree.

Danger, he had seen, was here.

The silence between them after she had spoken and in which, through her words, he thus had analysed the emotions which he believed he aroused in her, had continued unbroken until Clive had come in. Confirmation of the danger was in that, he had known; and continuing his analysis after the two had left him, narrowing down upon it through that long silence's example of her sense of security in his company, he had come then to a realization that from their earliest intercourse this danger, arising out of that in himself which attracted her, always had been present. That inscrutable regard which she had bent upon him in the car on the occasion of only their second meeting, its fellows often caught upon her face as their acquaintanceship had lengthened, had been attraction towards him

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in the same plane of her spirit's needs as brought her now to find a quiet in his company. As now was the attraction of unrest by rest, of faltering by stability, so then had been the attraction of inexperience by experience, the curiosity aroused in an unsatisfied nature by a nature seemingly satisfied. Her life had not been smooth. From virtual ostracism by the trinity of her step-relations she had passed, by the detached existence of service in other people's homes, to the long road of hopes and disappointments of her betrothal to Clive. In himself she had met one whom she saw as having weathered the ups and downs of life, as being finished with the hazards of the sea and come to anchor, sailing no more; and she had wondered what it must be to feel like that.

And he had offered her, further, analysing he had realized, those sharp dissimilarities from her own nature which sometimes will attract more strongly than the attraction of like for like. Hers was outstandingly a vivid personality, his eminently a sober; and often the vivid, dazzled by their own rays, will find a restfulness in sombre hues. She was volatile, he restrained; and often the mercurial, taxed by their own demands upon themselves, will seek relief in quiet temperaments. She was of her generation, chartered in liberty from all conventional restraint, he of his, conspicuous in decorum; and not infrequently a product of latter-day freedom, conscious of a certain vapidity where there is nothing to resist, will turn a wistful contemplation upon a seemlier rule of life.

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And, attracted thus by the profound dissimilarities in his nature from her own, she had sought too, and had found, similarities. With a smile he had recalled her expressing herself as "Heaps" interested in what she had called "this subconscious stuff," and as being in the same comprehensive measure engaged by what, adopting her diction, he had phrased "Island sort of stuff." At that first meeting at Craddock's Circulating Library, discovering their mutual interests, "Oh, larks," she had declared, "we're a pair of us"; and with those recollections of her first reactions to their meeting he had turned his mind then to the disturbing phenomena which had been his own. His dream that night of Jack, most strangely vividly fair of hue. His dream upon the night next following of Jo herself, standing before him in process of no action nor in any place of his recognition, aloofly smiling upon him, dazzling in her loveliness. Much more, his consciousness at their next meeting, when in the car he caught that enigmatic look of hers upon him, of a sensation in his breast which not possibly could he define — then.

Poignantly he had understood it since.

"We're a pair of us."

"Yes, by God, from the outset seeds of a pairing had been in them; a pairing unseemly in its match, foreign to nature, reprehensible before society, forbidden in any event by obligations of honour, yet calling him as with the wild's irrepressible demands upon the mating instinct. And conceivable, he had believed, of calling her. That was the

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fear both sweet and terrible, terrible because sweet, which he then had seen and which now, seated at his table, tensely thudding its edge, he knew in measure three months' intensified. Upon her portion of those seeds of a pairing between them circumstances had turned their rays as processes of incubation are turned upon the germ. From the outset, "We're a pair of us"; then, directed by circumstances of Clive's obduracy and moody intolerance, "It's quiet here with you."

Now?

Clear out? Flee this sweet and terrible dismay?

From the first that had been an obvious solution.

His hand's slow thudding on the table's edge might have been his mind's dull beat against the reason which withheld it from him.

At the outset, in the period begun nine months before when "Good God, I am in love with her" he had cried, he had rejected the idea of leaving Quaille as being the resort in part of a fool and in part of a coward. To go from Island House, to abandon the life which long he had designed and here in perfection had created, because of a disturbance in his heart the cause of which, should Clive bank on the prospects of his book and carry off his bride, in a month or two might be removed — that were, he had thought, to make himself a fool indeed. To go away temporarily only, to travel abroad until Clive's intentions were known one way or the other, was an obviously saner rendering of the expedient of giving up Island House for

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good and all; but it was when he considered this alternative that he came to see in any such course not only a fool's part but a craven's. Imagining himself aimlessly drifting in foreign places, sundered from his keen interests here because afraid to return to them, he had used the expression "skulking" in description of the lot to which he would thus have condemned himself, and the ignoble picture presented by the word had caused him to dwell afresh upon the figure which he cut in all this sorry matter. Aghast he had realized his feelings towards one whom his shocked self-accusation had presented to him as "this child, that boy's betrothed, good God": to go away, to run away, to skulk outside the walls, would not that be to take a step reducing him on his own admission to the level of some common sneak-thief not to be trusted where valuables were lying about? He felt that it would. And why run, further on this argument he had demanded of himself, from a danger which was of his own making, which was non-existent in the thoughts of Jo and of Clive?

He would not go, he had decided. He would face this out, live it down in its very presence; discipline himself against it as against any weakness should an upright man, not run from it as would an ignoble, a base, a craven.

Animated thus, girt with the strength which comes of integrity of purpose, he had turned about forthwith his former attitude to Jo. Whereas formerly he had avoided her company, blankly had met her look and blankly turned away his own, now, in the weeks leading to the publication



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of *Magic Casements* and onwards thence into the winter, he met her freely when she came to Island House, unequivocally took her glance and unequivocally gave his own. Those had been skulking practices, this was frankness; and while this period persisted, while still Clive clung to hopes of his book's success and Jo to hopes of his consent to bank on its chances and wed her on her means, Exceat had enjoyed at least the discipline of self-control. He looked facts — and Jo and Clive — in the face. He was playing the man and that is a clean, good game to play, hard though its knocks may be.

But with the passing of the period of hope, with Clive's defeat and its effects upon him and their reaction upon Jo, with his definite return then to his war and Jo's to her waiting, the conditions to be faced were changed, the reasons restraining Exceat from finding solution of his own plight in abandonment of Island House were altered to those against whose duress his hand now beat upon his table's edge. To abandon this place which gave Clive conditions for his writing such as he could find nowhere else would be, he saw, to abandon Jo to a period of waiting as long again perhaps as if the new book could be written, as had been *Magic Casements*, in the incomparable amenities which Clive found in the workroom. Even so, from start of another book to its definite fate — success or again failure — the better part of two years might be required. Exceat could not see himself "skulking" abroad for two years while keeping Island House in commission for Clive's

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use, and then perhaps, that book — who was to say? — also failing to bring Clive a marrying income, for another similar period, perhaps again another. That would be impossible. Wiser from dictate of common sense, not to say material expediency, to sell the house and go to live elsewhere. Which meant just what it would mean for Clive, and through Clive for Jo. No, he must stay here. For Jo's sake which was Clive's sake, and for Clive's sake which was Jo's, he must remain at Island House that Clive might have its workroom.

Clear out? Flee this sweet and terrible dismay which, since his decision, had come with her words "It's quiet here with you"?

It was not possible.

Thudding of hand's heel upon the table-edge before him; and then Jo, as Clive had said she might, came in.

## Chapter II

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**H**ULLO," Jo cried. "Where's Clive?"  
"Up the grounds." Exceat got to his feet to greet her, casting aside with his movement all that she might have seen of his mood. "He's a bit hipped, old Clive."

She nodded as one not surprised. "He pretty often is."

Exceat went to the bell. "Well, we'll get some tea ready for him. Where are you going to sit?"

"Here, on the couch by the fire. It's chilly, you know; feel."

He put his hand about the fingers she extended to him. "By Jove, you're cold. Look, I'll shove this nearer. How's that going to be?"

She sat herself on the couch, slim legs extended to the warmth, hands slipping off her close-fitting hat. "Fine. Little Polly Flinders, feet among the cinders. What's hipped Clive today, anything special?"

He went towards the table for the royalty-statement. "I'll show you. Hullo, Charles; you're pretty quick on the bell for once."

"Well, I was in the hall, you see, when it rung," explained Charles, entered and cheerfully directing upon Jo

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the cock-eyed grin with which it was his incurable habit to greet her or Clive on first finding either of them arrived.

"Well, you were pretty long then if that's all the way you had to come. Tea, we want, and —"

"Ah, well, I couldn't come," further explained Charles, "not for a minute, because I was showing Old Chairmender the trick of that hidden lock on that old box you bought up from Mr. Battiscombe's t'other day. You saw us, Miss, when you come in."

"Yes, I saw you, Charles," smiled Jo.

"Bothered if I can shut it now," chattily continued Charles, "that's the funny thing."

"The funny thing," said Exceat, "is what the dickens you were touching it at all for, much less showing it to Old Chairmender. I'll dashed well get a parlourmaid and keep you in the garden, 'pon my soul, I will, Charles. Get the tea and get some more logs too and get out of it."

His eyes exchanged amusement with Jo's. He had blessed the entry of Charles. Too soon upon the thoughts into which Jo's arrival had broken had come that intimate sensing of her by her request that he should feel her hand; too soon that picture ("It's quiet here with you") of her feet poised on the fender, the firelight's reflection glinting on her shoes, of the golden toss of her hair as she removed her hat, of the vivid beauty of her face beneath it. His emotions engaged thereby, the purposeful briskness of voice with which, not to let her suspect amissness with

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him, he had greeted her, had failed him, he knew, in the "I'll show you" with which he had turned away from her to get the royalty-statement. It was with the relief as of one suddenly coming upon place of deposit for a heavy weight that he had seen Charles's cock-eyed grin in the doorway, and in his familiarized exchanges with the youth he had put down, put away, his emotions. Jo now was laughing with him. He was himself again, able to regard her as in these recent weeks he had disciplined himself to do.

"The perfect house-boy," he smiled as Charles, effecting somehow to get the log-basket between his legs and fall over it at the door, with cock-eyed grin back at them went out.

"I love him," Jo declared, "and your way with him even more. What were you going to show me to do with Clive?"

"He's had his statement of royalties from his publisher; sales of *Magic Casements* to date — and his cheque by them."

He took the paper to her and watched her while she studied it.

He had noted her in her two previous references to Clive — in her "He pretty often is," and her "What's hipped Clive today, anything special?" — not as indifferent but as interested with no better than the politely sympathetic "How is he today?" with which one inquires after a confirmed invalid. He saw now, as she read the figures

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in the paper, concern draw in her lower lip and set her teeth upon it.

"Oh, poor Clive," she cried. "Oh, this will have been dreadful for him." The eyes that looked up at Exceat had tears behind them. "Oh, I must go to him. Up the grounds, did you say?" And she jumped up and paper in hand, leaving her hat, was gone from the room.

Intensely, softly, Exceat smote his right fist into his other hand. "That's it," his thought was. "That's what it is. She loves him as devotedly as ever she loved him. He keeps her waiting and wearies her; he's all moods with her and chills her from him. But let him stumble and hurt himself, let her have a reason to pour out her heart over him, and up and out it pours." He looked towards the side window and mentally saw again Clive's figure brooding there. "If only to God he'd open himself to her, give way, do what she wants; if only to God he'd let her take him as she wishes, she'd have the whole of heaven and earth in her hands, and I'd be out of her life as a puff at a candle and would dance at her wedding and live on here alone again as happy as they —" His eyes moved to the couch and to her hat, intimately suggestive of her, lying where she had tossed it. "— With just a picture, fading, on the wall." He took away his gaze. "If only to God," he spoke beneath his breath, "the thing could somehow be contrived. . . ."

But within three minutes of her leaving it was evidenced that all was not so clear-cut as he had seen it; within the

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half-hour he was to know the sweet and terrible danger between himself and her to be more hazardously poised than even, beating his hand against his table, he had had the fear.

He was standing just as she had left him when, within the former space of time, the open doorway framed her reappearance. She must have been told that Clive had gone, he thought, and said so. "Hullo, not gone, has he?"

She made a slow negation with her head.

"He's coming, is he?"

She came forward with dull steps. "I didn't look for him. I thought I wouldn't, after all"; and she went to the hearth and putting a hand to the high mantelshelf gave her regard to the flames.

All her mien told Exceat the reason why she had changed her intention. She had gone on the quick wings of love; she had stopped, and with those dull feet had returned, on the experience of how her sympathy might be received. Eager outpouring of herself had been in her going, rejection was in her return. A moment before he had been telling himself, left by her for Clive, that he could be put out of her life as a candle, with a single puff, is extinguished. But, halting on the threshold of giving herself to Clive's company, she had brought herself back to his company. And watching her now in the manifest darkness of her spirits he was consumed of a feeling renderable in terms of his candle metaphor as an impulse to put his

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hands about the flame that its gleam in her life might be protected. And she turned her head then and looked towards him. And at whatsoever was apprehensible by her in his eyes he saw, as if charged from beneath by currents tiding there, her own eyes deepen.

She said low, "What are you thinking of?"

He said gravely, "Of you."

Her hand at the mantelshelf had held it by no more than her finger tips. She pushed it forward to the circle of her thumb and put her thumb beneath it, a supporting motion. Her voice a shade husky as though her throat were dry, "That I ought," she asked, "to have gone on and looked for Clive?"

His voice level, controlled, "No; that I was glad you had come back to look for me."

She stretched apart her fingers on the mantelshelf, by pressure on them arching them. There was recalled to him his vision of that hand when he had seen it poised on a book at Craddock's Library as it had been a flower dropped on the surface of still water; he saw it now as roof of fairy grotto done in tinted crystal, exquisitely wrought. "Well, I think I'll sit down," she said; and stepping backwards set herself on the couch where, little Polly Flinders-like, she had sat at her first entry.

For a reason which he was to tell her Exceat's voice took on easier note. "Well, I think I will too," he said, and came to the couch's other end, a hand's reach between them.



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Still a thought husky, "And now you're smiling at something," she said.

"Again at you, at your 'Well'; did you notice that I imitated it?"

She also took some ease. "What's funny about it?"

"Your use of it. A sober grown-up would have said 'I think I'll sit down'; more probably would have said nothing, just sat. A child invariably announces its intentions and nearly always with a 'well' like yours in front of it. You're just a child, you know."

Smiling, "Well — there's 'well' again by the way — you're frightfully a boy," she said defensively, "in lots of ways, if you want to know. You're much more boyish in many things than Clive."

"Clive's got a brain; I've only got a box of tricks and naturally I play with it."

To this to his amusement she nodded an assent so complete that he was caused to laugh outright, at which she too laughed. "You're wise though, I think — wise-ish, that's to say. Tell me why you were glad that I came back to look for you?"

Reviewing, later, all this passage, he was to tell himself that, had she asked this of him immediately they had sat down, his self-control, already betrayed by his admission that he was glad, had been far worse imperilled. As it was, by the characteristic in consequence of her question she presented herself to him as restored to her normal vivid poise, and gladly he reclaimed by it his own self-possession.

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"Tell me first," he said, "why I'm only wise-ish, not fully wise, then I'll tell you."

"Well, I will," she cried brightly. "Dash those 'wells'; do I use them every time I speak? I call you wise-ish because as a matter of fact you are, if you want to know, absolutely Ish all over."

"Ish? What on earth's Ish?"

"Dash it, you ought to know. It's a dictionary word."

"Dictionary word! Schoolgirls' dictionary — of school-girl barbarisms."

"Barbarisms to you! It's in your own rotten dictionary over there on your table. I looked it up."

Sparkling, vivid in her childlike loveliness, she was in every tone and line and gesture the vivid creature of his first meeting with her at Craddock's Circulating Library, and with renewed gladness he put away his deeper feelings beneath her mood. "Find it," he challenged.

"Won't I just!" and she had jumped up and in a moment was back again with his Pocket Oxford, unashamedly licking her fingertips as she whipped over the thin leaves. "There you are: 'Ish, suf. forming adjs.,' which if you can understand your own dictionary's barbarisms means suffix forming adjectives. You jam it onto words making them have the sense, as it says here, see" (but his eyes were for the glinting filbert nail exquisitely sheathing the rosy fingertip pressed on the page) "of 'somewhat.' So wise-ish, somewhat wise; and an Ish man a man so only somewhat in every

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particular that you'd have no end of a job to describe him on, say, a Wanted-by-the-Police bill."

Exceat laughed anew. "Useful, by Jove; that'll encourage me when I qualify for one. How would the bill run, then?"

She cocked her head to one side in a quizzical regard which often had delighted him. "Why, all Ish, don't you understand. Height: not tall, tallish; colouring: not brown, brownish; eyes: not grey, greyish; expression: not kind —"

"Ah, good," he interpolated; "I couldn't bear to think I walked my face about with a kind expression on it."

She laughed. "I agree, but you don't; you score on the Ish there. Expression: not kind, kindish; *impression* — idea of you that you give people, I mean — not brainy —"

"Ah, dash, I lose there."

"Oh, I don't know; brains that stick out at you are a bit stuffy. Impression, not brainy, brainyish; age, not young —"

"Alas, emphatically."

She dazzled her smile, "— distinctly youngish."

The catalogue has been listed earlier in this chronicle. As then was told she opened here towards him the fingers of the hand on which she had been ticking-off her points, revealing him the lovely palm, rose-tinged, blue-veined, and summarized: "Leanish, strongish, funnyish, wise-ish; in any particular Ish — dictionary definition 'somewhat,' in reasonable speech 'not sticking out at you.'" She paused, and with a look then, in part quiz, in part other charged,

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"In one word for all of them," she told him, "niceish."

She held his eyes a briefest instant. She settled then her back against the cushions. "Now you," she said. "Tell me now why you were glad that I came back to look for you."

He had seen that other quality which had shared her look with her look's fun. It was cousin to those inscrutable regards of hers first bent upon him in the car, kin to that deepening of her gaze, charged from beneath by currents tiding there, which she had turned upon him from the mantelshelf. In that briefest instant while she held his eyes after her conclusion of her cataloguing it had overborne the quizzing which at first it had partnered. And because of it there was cut away from him, as foothold drawn from beneath the feet, the means to carry on the banter in which thankfully, five minutes before, he had found stability for his emotions.

He gave her a half-truth. His voice level, controlled, as when he had told her the thing he was now to explain, "I was glad," he said, "because I had the feeling that you were troubled and I liked to believe that you didn't mind bringing your trouble where I happened to be."

She gave deliberative nods of affirmation. Then quietly, "But there's no need," she pronounced, "to put it negatively. It wasn't that I didn't mind, nor where you happened to be. It was that I liked to bring the bother where I knew you to be." She smiled gently. "You're wise-ish, that's why."

He spoke more easily. "Good hearing — that you came

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a-purpose, as Old Chairmender would say, I mean. Unload the trouble, Jo."

With the hand nearer to him she picked at a thread on her skirt.

"Well, you needn't," he went on. "Of course I know that it was about Clive, about being a bit doubtful that he'd be in a mood to see you. Jo, he's taken all this *Magic Casements* disappointment mighty hard — on your account. This wretched royalty-statement seemed to his state of mind to put him, he used the expression to me, just where he belonged — in regard to you he meant. I do believe you were wise to let him come in in his own time. I do think he'd have felt if he'd seen you searching him out 'Here she is, dying to share life with me as I with her and there's that blasted paper in her hand showing her how utterly, again, I've failed to make it possible.' He'd be feeling, quite wrongly of course, humiliated. That's how to look at it, Jo; and I know, of course, that you do."

All through she had been picking still at the thread, and when he had ceased she picked yet a moment. Then she opened on him the flowers which to him were her eyes in the exquisite garden of her face and in her habit gave him inconsequence holding a sequence so piercing as to make him catch his breath. "X, do you want," she asked, "Clive and I to marry?"

He heard his pulses drumming in his ears. "I want it," he said steadily, "more than anything else in all the world."

It seemed that she could hold those flowers in gaze

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without the common need of movement of their lids. "Why do you?"

He felt an upward tiding in his face. "Because your happiness is more to me than anything in life."

Her lids fell then, remaining drooped; and with them her hand which had been on her lap dropped from it to the couch, lifelessly, palm upwards, fingers curved, as in a stillness falls a flower mysteriously disturbed where it had bloomed.

Exceat said, "Jo, I'm going to tell you something."

She raised her lids. "It's a 'because,'" he went on, "explaining the other 'because.' Smile, Jo."

She palely smiled.

"Your happiness is more to me than anything in life because." He smiled as one saying lightly a heavy thing. He spoke the words which when they are three in number — "I love you" — are of the malekind's most poignant of all utterances to woman; but he put into them other two words giving them an infinity of difference, and he spoke them in the voice in which, with the same smile, he remembered once addressing them, in her husband's presence, to the young wife of a close friend. With this purposeful choice of look, of voice, of diction, "Because I am in love with you," he said; and with gesture purposefully as dissembling as had been smile and tone and words he lightly touched the hand which flowerlike had dropped between them.

He was looking at her, not at his hand's direction. It

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was her open palm, the fingers curled above it, that he touched; and as on a previous time when, touching her hand in the car, he had imagined a pulse, a tremble, in response, so now, but in no fancy, he knew a quiver in what had fallen and had lain there as a lifeless thing, a faintest flutter of her fingers on his own, a gesture surely, conscious or unconscious, of support — if of no more — required and received.

And before he could speak to this most terrible and most sweet dismay, before he could reject, admonish, advise upon the dear and dreadful signal of her heart, or haply, forswearing his self-discipline, commit himself to answer of it; scarcely indeed before their mutual touch was parted, Charles with his tea-tray entered, Clive on his heels.

## Chapter III

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FOR THREE WEEKS, not meeting Jo in that period except in Clive's company, Exceat carried in his mind, as he that bore a fox in his bosom gnawing at his vitals, the poignancy of torment to which his earlier dismay was now advanced. Discovering to himself, hand drumming his table, before her entry to him on that day, that seeds of a pairing always, from their first meeting, had been in them; conceiving a possibility of their calling her to him as irrepressibly himself to her; "From the outset 'We're a pair of us,' " his thought had been; "then, 'It's quiet here with you.' Now?"

Within the hour that Now's import had been told. Her hand had quivered response upon his own. He knew then and for three weeks now had borne the knowledge, gnawing his mind, that it was in his power to influence her to love him.

Scanning the matter in whole, realizing his torment in sum and not in particular, How unthinkable a thing, by God, his thoughts would cry, to have broken into the tale of the life which he had come down here to lead. Started with so high-promising intentions as had been his, opened with such fond simplicities of delight as those with which



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excitedly he had surrounded himself, the tale disastrously had changed its thread. As it had been some treasure-seeking craft, unstintingly equipped for ease and enterprise, foundered upon a reef uncharted, impossible by any sign or likelihood to have been foretold, so on this impossible-to-have-been-conceived intrusion of love into its tenor the tale down here had come to wreck. In pursuit of curious alchemies — release of his past lives, reinvestment of himself in outlived phases of his being — he had come to Island House; upon an amazement shattering of them all, and of all else down here beside, unwittingly he had happened. He had set free his boyhood. He had rescued from their immurance this and that happy zest of his responsive years. Had he released, by God, an instinct, entombed in the tomb of Jack, which, fiercest of all the passions that may ravage a man, ranged now at large within him beyond his power to control?

Beyond his power?

If only to God, his thought would cry, he had not with his purposefully light utterance of "Because I am in love with you," touched her hand. It was from the knowledge in her answering touch that was drawn by his mating-instinct this new strength which threatened defiance of his self-control. "Your happiness is more to me than anything in life — because I am in love with you; because," it had been his intention playfully to continue, "as I can't marry you myself I want to see you in married happiness with a chap almost as good as myself, this Clive chap." With

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some such banter suggesting as illusionary whatsoever emotion he might have betrayed at her unexpected "Do you want Clive and I to marry?" and her "Why do you?," he would have picked up then the thread of his excuses made for Clive, justifying by kind counsel the "wiseishness" which she had found in him. Charles had come in, but Charles or any had been free to hear his "Because I am in love with you" as he had pronounced it. Clive had come in, but he would have turned to Clive and with "Here, Clive, I'm telling Jo that as I can't marry her myself —" would have brought him into the advice he would be giving her. But he had touched her hand and had received from hers her signal. Until that moment the out-lived instinct released from its entombing in the tomb of Jack had had no better for its forays upon his self-command than the terrible and sweet dismay that Jo might be susceptible to love for him; and those forays he had subdued and could subdue. In that moment he had known that in fact she was susceptible, that he could influence her to love him; and immediately, as a ravening wolf shown prey, his impulses had taken strength which threatened his control.

Beyond his power?

No secret glances passed between them. By no confusion of speech or guilt of air did either tell the other that that signal had been flown or taken. So barely perceptible had it been indeed that Exceat would have had no surprise, he told himself, if, meeting her alone and tell-

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ing her of that movement of her hand, she should give him, in childlike innocence of wonder, "Did I?" But he was assured that in the next instant a colour would suffuse her lovely face, her susceptibility towards him in degree deeper than she had realized revealed to her through (in her schoolgirl phrase at Craddock's Circulating Library) that "subconscious stuff" whose processes had caused her even then at their first encounter to tell him "We're a pair of us," whose intimation to her conscious senses had caused that closing of her fingers on his hand.

He imagined himself watching that colour tide upward from her throat to her temples. He imagined himself taking her to him in that almost swooning moment of that surge of revelation with "I love you. I have fought against it but it is not to be fought. We were pair, Jo — yourself you said it with these darling lips of yours — from the first instant that we met; and so we've got to pair; we must; I love you" — And in the very quick and orgasm of such an imagining it happened to him, standing close upon a midnight on the Bastille where he had brought his fever from the house, that he found himself put suddenly in the way of resolution of his conflict.

He had seen in imagination that colour tide upon her face; he had felt her in his arms; he had heard his voice uttering his love for her. Conceiving the rapture as taking place here on the Bastille, he was asking her "Do you remember that day we first came up here together?" when there came to him the recollection of her peals of laughter

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at the episode of the Wordsworth poem, and thence, by connection of that radiant mirth her face had shown, her striking together of her hands with "Oh, rather! Oh, jolly well put!" as, going down the woodland, he had told her of his suggestion to Clive to bank on *Magic Casements*; thence to her fond rush into the bear-hug of her lover's arms.

He drew a deep breath. Good God, if indeed up here he were to cause that colour-tide upon her childlike face, to draw her to his clasp, to tell her "We must pair; I love you," with how different a mien, Clive in her mind, must she then go down; with how distressed a spirit, reflected in her face, next meet Clive! At the former occasion it was with a song in her heart, a Pippa passing, that she had walked; now it must be with heaviest foreboding that she would tread. Then joy had lit her brow; now would be clouded there a dreadful apprehension.

He drew that breath again.

To what was he meditating to bring her? "She seemed," he had recited to her up here, "a thing that could not feel The touch of earthly years." Exactly that expressed her. By thinking to draw away her love whence it was pledged was he not meditating, good God, that which must touch her earthly so that the childlike loveliness of her spirit, reflected in her face, must take the staining print of a grievous wrong inflicted on her betrothed—must wear perhaps, as bloom once finger-marked can never be restored, some trace of it for ever? He bit his lip. That tide

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of colour which he would cause to flood from her throat to her temples, would it be, good God, submergence of a quality of childlike happiness which, through his action, she could never know again? "Your happiness," he had told her, "is more to me than anything in life." He clenched his fists. Of whose happiness, when he meditated influencing her to love him, was he thinking — of hers or of his own? He stared down through the night towards the house whose freedom had given happiness to those two. Was it giving happiness that now he contemplated or taking?

Giving happiness? A recollection came. His mental eyes saw writing that he had made in that room down there. "Is giving happiness living; is living giving happiness?" Something like that his pen had written. Let him go down and see how it had run. . . .

Here in this drawer somewhere it was. Several times on days immediately following the writing of it he had looked at it thinking to go on with it but never, somehow, able to; then it had gone from his mind. Where was it? Ah, here it was.

"For what *is* life but a giving?"

Yes, he remembered now. He had not actually written. "Is giving happiness living; is living giving happiness." That had been the speculation to which he had been brought by examination of the happiness which then he was enjoying; and affirming it, his pen had written this:

*"For what is life but a giving? It is a giving out of*

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*life from a fount of life. It is a giving of itself by a universal spirit into other spirits, thereby creating them. It is the active principle, the generator of life.*

*"Giving is life. The more that I give myself . . .*

*"In the measure that I give myself . . ."*

Perfectly well he remembered why there he had stopped, his pen refusing further. It was because his mind's eyes had seen Jo.

Perfectly well, conning it now, he realized why the thought of her had caused his sentence first to stumble then to halt. It was because even then subconsciously he knew that his design in her was not to give for another's happiness but for his own pleasure to take. It was because his thought of her, far from admitting mood of giving of himself to procure happiness for others, turned him instead to mood of taking from others that he might give to himself.

He got up and with slow steps and for a very long time paced the room. Between himself and Clive and Jo he saw now the position as ever since his knowledge that he could influence Jo to love him the position had in fact been but as only now, with his recall to "*Giving is life*" were his eyes, unsealed, enabled to envisage it. Clive, because he stood by his principles, was to lose all, alike his betrothed and the amenities of this house for his work; himself, because no principles should stand in his way, was to gain all. Jo, standing between them, was to be made to cause suffering that he might be caused joy.

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"Giving is life. To give is to live." It was in and by his life down here that he had found this principle, this secret, of life. It was when his life down here was at full tide of happiness that he had discovered it. While he was giving of himself to make the happiness of others — of Charles, of Old Chairmender, of Clive — happiness had flowed to himself in degree such as to parallel he must go back to his boyhood and to the peak of his responsive years and then not find in measure of hourly fullness quite the same. His impulses had turned to Jo, to taking for himself in place of giving of himself, and as a ship foundered upon a rock the tale of his life down here, he had been forced to cry, had come to end.

"To give is to live." Could he by giving reverse the situation between himself and Jo and Clive which he had created? By what manner of giving? By giving of what to whom?

He brought up with a jerk in his pacing. Immediately with his refining down of this line of consideration to its third degree — Of what to whom? — answer presented itself. Of Jo, of course (regarding her as his) to Clive. Alertly, in a questing gesture, he threw up his head. Give Jo to Clive? But how? By going away and leaving them? What giving was there? At best it was but a surrendering of what had not yet been proved his to surrender; in fact it was a withdrawal only of claim whose existence he had not yet tested. And it took from Clive — he had been over all this before — those very amenities from his work

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successful prosecution of which was his only means of actually, ultimately, being given Jo.

Give him the amenities!

All so far while he had stood with head uplifted questioning that "Give Jo to Clive?" had been in nature of debate. Now, sudden and established as light switched on in a dark room, came assertion. Give Clive the amenities. Give him Jo by giving him that which would enable him to take her.

He began again to pace but now not slowly with heavy feet, drooped head. Tremendous enterprises, and with them tremendous revelations, were occupying his mind; his steps were quick, excited; his head lifted, eager. Give the amenities — Island House; *give* Jo — give Clive the means to take her. Determining methods, working out sums in his mind, he suddenly stopped his walk and sounded aloud a joyful exclamation, the gayest sound that he had made for weeks. To give in the measure which alone could secure Jo's marriage with Clive entailed, as he figured it, the giving of virtually his all; and it was at the thought of giving all, alike at the magnitude, the splendid recklessness, of such a giving, and at the sense of, as it were, a bounding freedom thereby resulting to him, that he was caused to give his happy laugh.

From a drawer in his bureau he took a little book compiled for him by his Bank and inscribed "Piers Exceat, Esq., — Securities' Book." Revised for him when he had encroached on his capital for the purchase of Island House,



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it showed against each invested sum the approximate arrived yield thereby accruing to him, totalled at foot £761.10. Starting with the first of these entries he began to add up for himself the separate items. Five hundred pounds of arrived yield, the parallel of Jo's income on marriage, was the total he had in mind, and when, working down, he reached it — £513/10/ the exact figure caused by his last addition — with a pencil he drew a line across the book. Then in the margin he worked a subtraction sum: £513.10. from £761.10., residue £248. He laughed aloud. "Two-fifty a year! Who's giving all," he joked himself, "with such a sum left over with which to start again?" Leaning back in his chair he threw his arms apart as if actually casting from him his load, then, swooping them forward, with eager fingers drew pen and letter-paper towards him that his thoughts, teeming within him, — tremendous revelations come with his enterprise tremendous — might be given expression.

"Beachy Head, Cath," (he wrote) "I'm coming back! 'Back to the army again, sergeant,' as Kipling's re-enlisting soldier sings; back to my book No. 112 and to 111 more of them if, as I now have need to hope, my hand has not lost its cunning nor the publishers their fancy for the paces of a trusty hack. I'm coming back. How they'll all chaff me, all the crowd. But how I shall enjoy the chaff, because, Crays, as I went away Irresponsive so I return Responsive — in every fibre of me!

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"And proved right, Beachy Head my boy, and Cath my girl, about our outlived lives being immured within us, waiting release!

"Not, as I had thought — watch my handwriting turn serious — *the whole* of each phase of life through which one has lived and out of which one has grown. It's come to me tonight, after weeks, months, of a hell of a moral twisting, that only a part of each such phase of one's life goes into storage, into imprisonment, within one — the spiritual part. I've figured it out that, just as we one day slough our mortal part, retaining only the spiritual (what's left of it!) so our outlived phases, when they go to their entombing within us, slough their gross, their material, composition and retain only their spiritual. Each deposits its bit, one phase more another phase less according as one's spirituality has increased or has diminished during that phase, and the bits all join together, coalesce. Each, to use a term for my purpose, is a bit of splendour (as splendour the spiritual of course is — when you see it in a saintly face does not it shine?) and the coalescence of the bits is the deposit within one of an Imprisoned Splendour (Browning's term) releasable — by giving! Yes, Crays, we *can* release and get back into our outlived lives, we *can* become as once we were — by giving ourselves to others!

"I would jerk in here the Browning rendering of it if I could put my hand on it, but can't. The hazy memory of it came at me with a clap out of the blue not five minutes ago when I was throwing out my arms in a kind of ex-

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ultancy over all that I've this night got hold of — something, it is, about there being

. . . an inmost centre in ourselves  
Where truth abides in fullness . . .  
. . . and to know  
. . . consists in opening out a way  
Whence the imprisoned splendour may escape.

“The point that matters is how to effect the opening, and that, Crays, I've just told you — by giving.

“I don't mean material giving, one's goods and money-bags. Something of that may be involved; it depends on your opportunities. In my own case material giving, in pretty considerable measure, *has* been involved — if that can be called material giving which possession of a slick pen can more or less restore. But, no, the quality of giving that I mean, the quality necessary for the exhumation, the release, of one's imprisoned splendour, is the giving of oneself to the weal of others. Give yourself to the happiness of the man beside you, use your thoughts for the procuring of his happiness, not of your own; and by God, Crays — note that I say ‘by God’ — happiness surges about within you so that you're pretty well giddy with happiness.

“I am!

“And there's another thing that I've this night discovered; the most encouraging thing, I'd say, that one can possibly know. It is that a man is never tried morally beyond that which he has moral strength to bear. Maria (wasn't it?) handed it to Sterne during his sentimental

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journey when she told him 'God tempers the wind to the shorn lamb.' I've been through a hell's own moral conflict lately. You shall hear all about it when we meet; sufficient for the moment for you to accept that it was *hell's* own and that I seemed to have about as much chance of doing the right thing in it as is the chance of a snow-ball in that place. A better man than I might have said prayers for strength. I didn't and I'm glad now that I did not. Strength's come at me through my release of my imprisoned splendour, and my reckoning now and henceforward for the rest of my life is that every human soul is given — has *got* — spiritual strength up to the limit of which he may conceivably find himself tried and beyond whose pitch of endurance he will never and in no circumstances be taxed. He needn't ask for the strength; he's *got* it. For his every special emergency he's *got* all the strength there is. Ask to be reminded that you've got it — that's all right. The other thing's no better than whining to God that he's been unfair.

"So that's another glorious find, Crays, with which I'm coming back to barracks again; and it comes to me that there's yet a third. Not so much a find, perhaps, as a compensation at the other end to a well-behaving little boy for whatever he may be giving up at this end (my beloved bike, my shorts, my lusty sweats on my desert-island estate, my stamp-album evenings! My bucket, in fact, and my spade, and all the donkey-rides and paddling that has gone with them!) The compensation, I mean, of being able

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to exploit another of my little fancies for which, down here, I've had positively no use whatever. My little rhyme, good Crays, which I recited to you that evening in your sitting-room and which I'll admit now that I wrote all by myself:

The hurtful word, the hate-full thought,  
Cast from me, Lord, as Christ oft wrought  
The self-same miracle when He  
Freed men possessed in Galilee.

"Obviously I was right when I told you that I suspected the hate-stuff to be the biggest bricks of one's bricking-in; how can one give oneself to others, thereby getting back to what one once was, if one's all clogged up with resentments? But that's not the point. Point here is that it crowds upon me this night — revealed, shall I say, by the Liberated Splendour? — that down here I've never had and never should have had one solitary soul, year's end to year's end, to put me up to hate or hurt. Too sheltered, Crays; too swaddled up in cotton-wool. What's the virtue in determining to rid yourself of hate or hurt to neighbour and then digging yourself in where the World's Worst Cantankerousity couldn't find aught to vex him? How far are you going to help to rid the world of hate by that? It's like keeping a hunter in your stables and using him only for ambling round the village green; or owning a sea-going yacht and cruising her only in Cowes-roads; or like having a suit of chain-mail, lance and horse, and proving them no further afield than within the keep. So I'm

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coming back into the murk and the mist, into the tumult and the shouting, onto the treadmill and the galleys, to delight myself by showing me to myself as, shall I say, a peacemaker in a warring world.

“The whole of which amounts to this — I’M COMING BACK!

“At which point, before adding my signature, I’ve just read over what I have written and it occurs to me, to my high satisfaction, that I have done in this letter what I thought, to my profound regret, that I had failed to do. I had planned to write down here a book into which I was going to put whatever I might find (down here) was in me. It was to be done solely for my own satisfaction and delight, not for profit — my philosophy of life, the harvest of my mind. Once at least I actually started it; tonight I find that actually I have written it. It’s called ‘Testimony of Piers Exceat’ and if you will scribble that at the head of this letter you will have, complete, the one and only copy.

“As aforetime, but wait till you see how Responsive  
now, P. E.

“P.S. Posting this to you at Cannes. A matter of days only should see me through here — and I’ll be in London before ye! Shall stick up at a Bloomsbury hotel until I find quarters. *And*, lest you should have gathered that I’m coming back poorer than I went, you’ll find me, on the contrary, now enjoying always the luxury of my own personal body-servant. Name of Charles.”

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He looked at the clock. Half-past three and he was for town, he had determined, by the 9.30, visits to his banker and to George Stone who had seen through the conveyancing of Island House for him and who held the title-deeds. But he never had felt less like need of sleep, three hours would do him fine.

He took from his pocket-book a snap-shot of Jo which she had given him.

## Chapter IV

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EXCEAT had anticipated a certain amount of protest from Clive when he should set his designs before him. He was prepared for that; and the basis of his preparation, what he should say and how deal with embarrassed expostulations, was the worldly fact that, all affection and mutual understanding between himself and Clive, between patron and protégé, apart, the young man who is going to refuse the free gift, out of the blue, of a house and some £12,000 soundly invested, has yet to be born and improbably ever will be. For the protests of his solicitor and, though in more diffident key, of his bank manager, and for the discovery that to give away a house and a nest-egg is by no means done (as in effect he had supposed) merely by saying "Here you are — catch," he was by no means prepared.

George Stone, lifelong friend, strutting about behind his stomach, hands deep in pockets, in his impressive office in Bedford Row, declared that it never had been done and (at first) that he was damned if he was going to be a party to it. "Do you realize," he demanded, "that a solicitor, leave obligations towards a client out of the matter, is responsible to a code of professional conduct? What the blazes



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do you suppose the Law Society is going to say to me if I tell it that I drew up a Deed enabling a lunatic to skin himself to his shirt?"

"Don't tell 'em," grinned Exceat. "You don't rush round and tell 'em every time you draw up a contestable will, do you, skinning the widow, and the orphan, in the subsequent haggle? So why about this, as you say, reprehensible Deed of Gift that I'm requesting — except that it never would be contested; I suppose they might slug you for that?"

George Stone laughed. "Seriously, though, Piers — "

Exceat put out his hand. "For the love of Mike don't start that again; I want this lunch you're going to stand me. You've told me that the two things, the house and the securities, are separate entities, so all that your Deed of Gift is going to help skin me of is the house. You needn't know anything about the boodle and I'm sorry I ever told you, the time you've wasted over it. Of course that's how you make your money; I'll be damned if you shall lunch me anywhere but at the Ritz."

"If you find two other guests at our table," said George Stone solemnly, "you'll know that they're a couple of alienists watching you for the purpose of certifying you, so look out for yourself. Very well, I'll do you this Voluntary Conveyance, as it's called, and in due time, as I've told you, your District Valuer will go down and size up the place. I'll see it through for you and report to you at whatever asylum they quarter you in; and your bank-

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manager no doubt will call there with the Voluntary Transfers which are what you must ask him to prepare for you. Got your hat; or do you wear now only straws in your hair?"

They took their lunch, at the Berkeley; Exceat took from his bank manager misgivings prefaced with "Of course it's not my business" and gravely addressed to him over joined finger-tips; and straws of another significance were brought to his mind as, his designs thus actually set afoot, he passed through the booking-office at Paddington to take his homeward train. "Tickets show which way the wind blows" was his thought's beginning, a whimsical twitch of his lips its effect. On the last occasion of his being here he was taking a single-ticket for the first time that he could remember, "Good-bye to all this" his song as he pocketed it. The next booking he would make, from Quaile, would be single fare again, and for the last time; "Good-bye to all that" as he —

He stopped short in his walk towards his train. A hurrying passenger, caused thereby to bump into him, exclaimed impatiently, then, glancing at his face, said "I'm sorry." The face was the face of one in sudden twist of pain. "Good-bye to all that." It was in gusts such as this that, since his determination of his course, a poignancy of what he was imposing upon himself would sweep over him. Whilst he was engaged with his intentions as it were in whole, prosecuting his plans or contemplating their completion's picture, he could carry thought of Jo in his mind

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without quaver of his emotions. All that he was giving was being given for her; and while in effect he actually was giving, or in prospect actually had given, she no more than as it were stood by smiling and to be smiled at as many a child who watches busy preparations for its comfort or for its entertainment. But there were moments when, at some thought such as "Good-bye to all that" he was constrained to withdraw from his preparations into the private office of his mind; and often, as now, she would break in there unannounced upon him and he would seem then to be quite alone with her, nothing between them, no sound about them, only they two in all his world, his every sense possessing her. This deeply smote him. He would catch his breath at pain of it . . .

He was early for his train. He walked to his platform's end and looked upwards towards the western sky, twilight's drooping curtain pinned by a single star. "Good-bye to all that." That evening star, love's harbinger, beloved of lovers, paling in mists from his view even as he watched, stood for the all comprised in his good-bye. Had it gone? No, fondly gleaming to him there again. From a book which at this time he was reading to Old Chairmender (who could not read) Mr. Hold-the-World stepped out and up to him and spoke into his ears: "For my part I count him but a fool that, having the liberty to keep what he has, shall be so unwise as to lose it."

However, after a moment he slowly shook his head, and turning back took his train.

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Clive, after the embarrassing part of it was all over and agreement reached, gave his signature to the proposals by dropping heavily upon a chair and ejaculating, widely spacing his words, "Well — I'm — simply — stunned."

It had been at least not more hard than Exceat, basing his expectations on his assurance that a young man who will not accept a house and an income come at him out of the blue has yet to be born, had believed it might be. He had dealt himself a strong hand, palming several cards with no compunction at the fraud involved, and he had played it well. First, palming freely, he had broken it on Clive's surprise, that he was hopelessly out of joint with the idle life he was leading down here and insupportably crazy to get back to the busy working life he had left in London. Yes, certainly he had often professed delight in all this at Island House; his professions latterly had been, as a matter of shameful fact, lies uttered to himself in order to try to persuade himself that he really was enjoying what with so much elaboration he had set out to enjoy, *had* enjoyed at first, but now was fairly loathing. "If I were a novelist like you, it would be different of course. But I've been virtually a free-lance journalist; and once a journalist always a journalist, they say — and, man, to get back to the publishers' offices, and printing-presses humming at the back of Fleet Street, and the idea for a new book every time you open the evening paper, and commissions by telephone and 'Can you rush it in a fortnight, do you think?,' and then scarcely going to bed or

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washing in the rushing of it — *man*, I'm off back to it." A fair heaven of a commission just offered to him had finally decided him, he was *off*, hot foot.

Marvellous. Clive swallowing it like butter. Out with the next deck of sleeved-aces.

He was a much wealthier man than Clive probably had any idea of, *much* wealthier. Not a Nuffield, of course; not a Rothschild; but in his own little way, thanks to inheritance and to misguided legacies, not to say to the ease with which his kind of tripe pulled in the golden eggs as compared with the rewards of Clive's gifts (at *present*, old man) — in his own little way a chap who could sink quite a packet of thousand-pound notes and never realize the loss of it. *And* a bachelor; *and* a lowly relativeless orphan; *and* getting on in life; *and* with not a soul to leave his money to when he conked out; *and* with a surely-to-god reasonable enough ambition to do with a bit of his superfluous money — something over which he could puff himself with pride.

Admirable. Clive, swallowing automatically, thoroughly interested.

Now then. The real honestly picked-up hand.

"Clive, d'you remember when I was pluming myself over being a literary patron, your patron, sometime ago, that I said that to get out of it all the satisfaction it could give me I'd be ready to do a jolly sight more than merely put a room at your disposal? Well, I now am going to. I'm going to put a houseful of rooms at your disposal. I'm going to give you Island House."

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Bewilderment-act by Clive; fat-rich-uncle-chuckling-over-sensation-caused-by-his-generosity-act by Exceat. Exceat anxiously waiting, secretly, for the card to be played which will lead him the suit he desires.

Clive plays it. "But, but, apart from all that, how could I, what use, how on earth — I mean, X, I mustn't of course talk about white elephants in connection with such a, such a, well, really, too wonderful thought on your part; but, man, you surely must realize, with short of thirty bob a week unless I'm filling a job, what earthly use could a place like this be to me? See?"

And it was then that Exceat, casting aside the pseudo-jocularity in which all his talk had theretofore been draped, drew up his chair close beside the other and, as father to son, got down to it.

"Clive, the whole rôle of a patron of letters is to secure for his protégé conditions of life in which he can give his work to the world and shed reflected glory on his sponsor. What are such conditions in your case? I've got to know you, Clive, in these months as I might have known a son, and I know the essential conditions for you as a physician knows the exact medicine for his case. They are occupation of this house, the inspiration of which to you, you have told me, you'll never find elsewhere in England, *and* the winning of your heart's desire, name of Jo. Conceive yourself, Clive, set up in this house-of-your-own with Jo beside you, wife-of-your-own. Sit and imagine it, Clive, for half a moment. Imagine a wand waved and

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yourself master of this house, Jo mistress, and nothing to do the live day long but work and love. Shut your eyes and see it."

He paused an instant, Clive, dimly perceptive, deeply breathing. "Done? Pretty attractive, eh? Well, Clive, instead of sitting on my money-bags until, with no satisfaction to myself that I shall be able to enjoy, I leave them, unopened, for someone else, I'm going, for the future, to sit on only part of them and hand the other to you. It's got to match our Jo's figure to a sixpence so that those principles of yours will die a glorious death; £500 a year, to say nothing of Jo's, will be an easy sum on which to run this place just as I've run it. Clive, when I went to town yesterday it was to take out Letters Patent for my patronage of letters. I took 'em out at my lawyer's and my banker's. I arranged, in fact, to hand over to you the investments which will raise your weekly dole from thirty bob to the thirty plus whatever £500 divided by fifty-two is. Five hundred a year, friend protégé, house and its contents, just as they stand, chucked in."

Patiently, tactfully; firmly with the firmness of insistence upon the proud joys to himself of his own side of the bargain; blandly with the blandness of persistent reference to his ample means and to his eagerness to return to the only way of life that suited him, he rode Clive over the obstacles reared on the foundations "I couldn't. I couldn't possibly. It's unthinkable. It's unheard of." In half-an-hour, the winning-post passed, Clive, now pacing

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the room in a tumult, off-saddled in the unsaddling enclosure with heavy drop into a chair and widely spaced "I'm — simply — stunned."

Practical matters. There would be "funny business, seems to me" sort of gossip, Exceat said, if he walked out of Island House and Clive on his heels walked in and the actual terms of the transaction were made known to all and sundry. Clive, the plan should be, would announce to any concerned the veritable fact that he had unexpectedly come into money; Exceat, with equal truth, that, giving up life here to return to his London work, he had disposed of Island House to Clive. "You'll marry, you two, as soon as may be, go for your honeymoon and not too short a one, and returning will enter into possession here as naturally as any newly-married couple into any house in the country." Exceat would go next week. This day he would tell Miss Baize of giving up here but that all would be kept standing for quite a bit yet; later he would write to her that Clive had taken over. "You and Jo will keep her on, of course; and Clive, Old Chairmender must stay life-pensioner."

"Good lord, yes," Clive breathed. But that his eyes were shining with the watery brilliance of emotional ecstasy, Clive was sitting as one in a trance, breathing "Yes, yes" to each glowing picture passing on Exceat's words before his eyes.

"He's quite useful about the place now," Exceat went on, "takes his meals in the kitchen, d'you know, you who once



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said, do you remember, that you couldn't see Miss Baize weaning him. Charles's place you'll have to fill. I'm going to take Charles; life without him to curse I couldn't imagine and I shall train him up to be able to fend for himself when need be as accomplished gentleman's servant. Imagine Charles accomplished!" He got up. The watery brilliance of those eyes were of a spirit, he knew, scarcely able to contain itself before all this could be poured out to other ears. "Clive, that's all, I think, for the time being anyway — and you're bursting, aren't you, to tell Jo? You'll find her in now, I'd say; it's after six."

Clive squeezed his hands almost to crack them. "I can't say it properly. I've tried to and couldn't, and can't yet. I'm still stunned, simply stunned. I can't say it."

Exceat patted his shoulder. "You run along and tell Jo"; and when Clive, obeying, had gone he stood at the window watching him as halfway down the drive, walking top speed, he suddenly wildly tossed his arms aloft and then with giant strides went leaping, tossing his arms again with every bound.

"By God, that's cheap at the price, that joy," was Exceat's thought. "I ought to have sent him on the Wizard" was his then reflection; and at that the smile with which he had been watching left his face. "Must keep that; might forget it when the time comes if I don't do it now."

He went up to the stables to the Wizard's home and taking a screwdriver from the tool-bag removed the cyclometer. "Seven, seven, two, one." He put it in his pocket.

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He had waited to fix Clive before speaking to the members of his household. Distasteful jobs are best not delayed, and, Old Chairmender not to be seen about the stables, he went to the kitchen to find there that two could be told together.

Island House's kitchen, designed in an age superior to economy of space, of material or of labour, was a roomy apartment having the appearance, thanks to its architect, to time and to Miss Baize's passion for spotlessness, of, Exceat always thought, a Dutch interior. Much to the picture, Miss Baize, as he entered, sat upright in an upright chair on one side of the gleaming range, knitting. Old Chairmender, decoratively to the design in a sleeved plush waistcoat with pearl buttons presented him by Exceat at Christmas, knitted skull cap made for him by Miss Baize for the same occasion, cord trousers, cloth leggings and brilliantly polished black boots, sat armchaired on the other, dipping bread into a bowl of tea.

Exceat knew a pang.

"Don't get up, Miss Baize. I've some news for you; you too, Chairmender. A bit surprising perhaps but not going to unsettle either of you tuppence; please get well hold of that before I start." He came midway between them, resting back on the table, smiling at them. "I'm thinking of leaving here."

He told his planned story.

Throughout it neither listener spoke. By frequent pauses he invited comment; in the matter of taking Charles he ad-

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dressed Miss Baize with direct interrogation as to her views. Miss Baize throughout sat pursed to such constriction as to show the inner side of her lips; Old Chairmender chewed with the ceaseless motion of that stubborn chewing while he had refused accommodation in the farm-cart outside the Quaile Arms.

Discomforted, Exceat came to end. Still no word. On his left seemingly a permanent tetanus, on his right as incurable a working of the jaws upon, he feared, a bitter cud; and concernedly watching the pair he conceived it, not for the first time, to be a monstrous injury, peculiar, as is all injustice, to the humankind, that one class of the social order should have arrogated to itself the right to say to another "I choose to do thus and thus; take you the consequences."

The large yellow-faced clock upon the wall with enormous ticks accentuated the silence. This was horrible. Ah, Old Chairmender, thank heavens, giving a wriggle in his chair, ceasing his chewing, protruding his lips, bending forwards towards the stove, about, thank heaven, to spit.

Almost in the act, Old Chairmender glanced at Miss Baize, eyes above her lockjaw on her racing knitting-needles, blinked as one remembering a distasteful lesson, and, correcting his intention, convulsively swallowed. Then spoke.

"I always knowed," declared Old Chairmender throatily, "the bleedin' sack —"

With a sharpness as edged as its abruptness was startling,

## AS ONCE YOU WERE

"Not in my kitchen, please, Mr. Chairmender," Miss Baize broke in; and she then, to Exceat's even greater surprise, jerked to her feet and hurrying past him, face down-held, went through the scullery door, closing it behind her.

Old Chairmender gave a moment to determination that it was well shut. "Speaking without female ladies interfering of yer," he then said, "I always knowed the bleedin' sack was comin' to me soon or late, always has bin; I've 'ad 'im for mate always, the barstard; 'e don't worry me." He spat a hisser on the stove, produced a huge red handkerchief and polished it away. "All the same to that — " he said; and Exceat then took him up.

"Chairmender, there's not the slightest question of the sack, bleeding or other. Surely to goodness, old chap, I've made that clear. You'll go on here just exactly as you always have done, so will Miss Baize. There won't be a thing altered, not a thing. I've got further plans in my head which I can't tell you at present but I can promise you this much, that whoever takes my place here will be one — well, I'll bet you when you find who it is you'll never realize there's been a change. Now then, how's that?"

Old Chairmender had chewed through this. "The sack's the sack," he said and chewed again. "Yer've got a boss and next day yer've got another bleeder and that's the sack, stay where you be or not." He stared at the stove. "I'll miss your footstep," he said, "that's how 'tis. I'm up at my bucket fire up there and I hears your step and I

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thinks ‘ ‘Ere’s ‘e,’ I thinks, an’ I’ll miss it, see?” He chewed.

Exceat felt a hotness behind his eyes.

“Chairmender, I’ll arrange a footstep for you that you’ll get to look for just exactly as mine. You like Miss Pryde. What if I get her to come up and carry on reading that pilgrim book? Look, that I definitely can promise. She’ll carry on just where I leave off; didn’t I tell you you’ll not know there’s been a change?”

“I looks for your step,” said Old Chairmender doggedly, “and I shall look for it, them bleeders after that Christian bloke or not, and not hear it; an’ I’ll miss it, see?”

To Exceat’s relief Miss Baize re-entered. She was familiarly pursed but her eyes looked odd. “Sir,” said Miss Baize, unpursing across the table between them, “there’s all tastes and gentlemen that comes to a place with one taste is free to go as they wish with another and no word said by those not in a position to say. One word I’ll take leave, however, to say to your face and not care who hears me, Mr. Chairman nor other, nor withdraw if the Bible was put before me and ’twas my last. I’ve had me feet under gentlemen’s tables all me life and grudged service none can say; but your like for all your ways, Scouts’ knickers and that, has been suitable to me as none, and when your face goes from these walls —” She pursed with the sudden contraction of one taken unawares. “—I’ll wish it back,” she unpursed.

Exceat, the hotness again behind his eyes, stretched his hand across the table. “Jolly nice of you, Miss Baize; and

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mine it will be to make the new face, or faces, such that you'll cease to wish it. That's a promise. All right about my taking Charles?"

Miss Baize, pursed beyond speech, nodded only; and it remained for Charles himself, absent theretofore on his Scout half-day, to present his own views on the matter. Bursting in as Exceat was finishing his dinner, "I say," he cried, "that's never true, the two of us going off to live in London together?"

"It was till you came charging in in that infernal way of yours, now I'm not so jolly sure."

Charles delivered himself of the yelping sound into which his cock-eyed grin frequently would develop. "Lumme, what they'll say at the Scouts when I tell 'em! What'll us do, eh? See the sights?"

"See the sights! What the devil do you think you are, Charles, my son or brother or what? You'll learn, a darn side stricter than I've been able to handle you here, how to behave yourself as a manservant; and I've got the idea, too, of putting you through some school lessons in your spare time. That's what we'll do, so far as you're concerned."

Charles, irrepressibly in cock-eyed excitement, knelt on a chair beside the table. "Ah, but we're bound to go about a bit, in an' out like."

"Get off that chair. Stand up, man. If you don't find yourself packed back to your aunt in the first week I'll let you see a place or two, I daresay, now and then —"

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"Tell you the first," broke in Charles. "Tussaud's, you bet. Look, what about us staying a night in the Chamber of Horrors? A hundred pounds they pay you, if you can last out, and five hundred if your hair's gone white in the morning. It's a fact."

"It's rubbish, you silly ass; a pure invention. Get yourself found in there after the place closes and you'd be handed over to the police; that's all the hundred pounds you'd get out of it."

Charles registered cock-eyed gloom. "Tell you what, though," he brightened, "I wouldn't half like to do it, reward or no. One of our Scouts says there's a bath in there what a chap drowned two of his wives in. What if I popped in there last thing to hide and you stop outside of the place case they copped me and help swear I got shut in by mistake? Eh?"

"Thanks," said Exceat, getting up. "You buzz off and tell Miss Baize that I don't want any coffee and that if you ever come in here again without your pantry-jacket she's got you for life. Buzz."

"Where'll we be living, though, in London?" Charles, reluctantly withdrawing, persisted. "What like of a place?"

"Why, we'll get a set of chambers in an Inn, I rather think."

Cock-eyed bewilderment. "Set of *chambers*?"

Exceat laughed aloud. "You didn't think the Chamber of Horrors was — Set of rooms, you stupendous idiot."

## AS ONCE YOU WERE

But when presently he was standing about in the work-room, too ill at ease to sit, the day behind him, night's solitude ahead, there descended upon him in full measure a feeling which, ever since his turning back to his train from the platform's end at Paddington, continuously had oppressed him. It was a feeling of an odd numbness of his senses as though some muffling were between them and his perception of their operations, much as in regard to sense of hearing will follow from a heavy dosage of quinine. He had spoken with a fellow-passenger in the train and had been conscious of it then. It had been present in his talk with Clive, vital though that had been; in his words with Miss Baize and with Old Chairmender, hotness though he had been caused to feel behind his eyes; in his exchanges with Charles, amusement though he had been given.

A numbness, a detachment from his visible doings had possessed him, and he knew the cause. All contacts since that star had gleamed and paled and gleamed again had been but temporizing with an issue of which, even the determinations with Clive, they were but the fringes; disconcerting or distractive in their several degrees but susceptible of being put aside as tall grasses seeking to impede one passing to the place of some disclosure which they would hide.

And he had just noticed indifferently that the hour of ten stood upon the face of the clock when he heard approaching up the drive a car the tone of whose engine he recognized. Its door slammed. He heard the front-door



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open, feet across the hall, a hand at his door, and he knew that the issue now was come to him.

He braced his back against the mantelshelf. The door opened. Jo stood there.

## Chapter V

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SHE SAID to him: "What have you done?"

She had drawn-to the door behind her. Her left hand still on its handle, she delivered her demand to him across the room between them, her figure upright in the entrance frame. He never previously had seen her in an evening frock. She wore what to his male apprehension was some sort of a blue thing, china blue, of silk; at her throat a white silk collar, cuffs at her wrists. It had to his eyes the something Quakerish, nothing *to* it, suggestion of a girls' school's evening-party uniform; and it accentuated the virginal lines of her figure; and it held up the childlike loveliness of her face; and he thought that never until now had he realized in full how exquisite was her beauty, how pristine her youth; and he could have thought, had it come to him, that if she was come now to ravish him with her loveliness in no other guise or pose, framed in that doorway in that blue, could she have bettered her design.

"What have you done?"

She was a child; by directness of diction, by mingling in voice and in look of accusation, reproach, bewilderment, a child upon whom a wanton trick had been played; and be-

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cause, in that first instant, he saw her thus he put out his hands to her and went across to her, smiling. "Put Clive firmly in the marriage market, that's what."

Her face gave no reception to his flippancy. "Why have you?"

He had come up to her, hands offering. "Come and I'll tell you why."

These two had heretofore approached no nearer to mutual token of an affinity between them than by a touch of hand on hand so slight as to be, had either wished, deniable. Now by that mysterious telepathy of instinct by which heart speaks to heart he claimed and she, responding, gave a bond that such existed.

She put her hands in his.

He felt a droop come with them, a relaxing, physically expressed, of a pent emotion, a sigh given material form: more than these, a delivery of her spirit into his charge; and a profound compassion engulfed him. He took her to the couch and they sat down, hands still in hands. How this interview, when it should come, should be conducted by him he had been in no whit able to devise. Clive, Miss Baize, Old Chairmender, George Stone, his bank manager, with each of these his course had been determined before he had entered upon it. What he should say here in this moment now upon him he not only had been unable to determine but had found himself unable even to imagine in alternatives from which he might select. The moment was come and he found that the compassion with which he had

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been overwhelmed was in governance of all his emotions towards her, directing them, directing also his expression of them with words which, unpremeditated, he found that he had but to open his mouth to speak.

"How old are you, Jo Pryde?"

One could have said that with that droop of her hands into his hands she had delivered indeed her spirit to his charge as will the subject of hypnosis to the mind directing it, or that seated there with him, hands in hands, was an abandonment of herself to content as in a hammock, swayed by what breeze will. All with which she had come into the room seemed to have gone out of her. She gave him just as he gave her.

"I'm twenty-three, Piers Exceat," she smiled.

"I'm fifty-six."

"An Ish man — youngish."

He disengaged his right hand. "If you think yourself ever perhaps deceived in a man's age by his looks look at his hands. Put your hand by mine, the back of it. By God, that's an ugly thing, Jo, mine."

"'Hands,'" she quoted herself, "'strongish.'"

"You hadn't looked at them close, like this. Jo, that's a beastly sight, that hand, by yours. Do you see the million little pinpoint lines, the horrid puckers over the knuckles, the skin that doesn't go back — look — when you pluck it up? That's age, Jo. Look at yours. Would you say that a dish of fine cream by a bowl of coarse porridge would be about the comparison of the surfaces? That's youth, yours.

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And now there's this; if you want to see the male counterpart of your hand, look at Clive's."

She said gently, "What's this all about?"

He took again the hand which he had disengaged. "I'll tell you. It's about a man with hands like those who fell in love with a child with —"

She made a small and quick indrawal of her breath.

"— with hands," he went steadily on, "like yours. It's about also a boy with hands like Clive who wrote them to the bone for love of the same child and couldn't marry her just precisely because his sense of rightness was as gloriously fresh and young as the skin over his knuckles."

He bent her left hand so that her knuckle-bones stood in four gleaming points between three rose-tinged dips and put the backs of his own right fingers by them.

"What about, as you call her, the child?" she asked.

"The child developed the ill idea that there might be a certain virtue in the wrinkled hands that wasn't in the others, a reliance, a steadiness," he smiled, "a strongishness." He slightly pressed her hands, and, not smiling, on a deeper, almost a stern note, said "Good God, Jo, what a virtue for a child to seek — a sort of pair of mittens, of elastic-sided velvet boots, a foot-cosy, a chest-protector, when romping fun and bare legs and days without nights and running unshod with an unshod wild young colt for playmate are her young heart's blood. She'd stifle, peak and pine and fade away with those mittens, with those velvet boots. Good God, does she not know that any qualities she may see in an

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older man have been desired of her solely because, her play-mate kept in school, she's felt a bit forlorn? His holidays have begun today, Jo. I saw him go bounding off to tell his chum he'd broken up."

A small silence. While he spoke she had been moving a thumb gently to and fro on the hand that held its hand, a reflective motion and her eyes reflectively upon it.

She raised her eyes. "Well, that's the child," she said, "you say. This other man who you say fell in love with her; tell that. When did he first?"

His words, as has been said, were put into his mouth by the compassionating of her to which he was moved. Those he now spoke to her not in his fondest dreams of her could he have imagined himself as ever permitting himself to utter. With no misgiving, nevertheless, with that certitude of wisdom, on the contrary, which is projected from the heart that has no guile, or by which is directed the skilled surgeon who probes to heal, steadily he told them.

"Jo, he loved her from that day he first . . . Let's drop pretence and parables. I loved you, Jo, on that day when first I met you in Craddock's, when your hand put up to a book touched mine and I turned and saw your lovely face."

She disengaged her hands from his. She put her hands to her young breasts and drooped her head above them; and he had poignancy of grief to see so virginal a thing in such a pose of woe. But he went on —

"I didn't know then that I did, nor in the car soon after,

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though there I had a sense towards you that might have told me. But it had happened; like this it had happened, Jo. Listen:

You came into my mind, I found you there.  
You were my poem then, for in my heart  
Lovelier than a sonnet, you made rhyme  
And I had memorized you unaware.

“What have I done, you asked me when you came in just now, and why have I done it? I have given you the happiness and having given it to you shall have of you the happiness which, if I could have met you when I was Clive’s age I would have given you and would have had of you in another way. ‘With all my worldly goods I thee endow’; the gift I’ve made to Clive is not to Clive but to you, to Clive as part of you.”

He paused and touched her knee. “That’s that, I’ve told you now. Now a lecture, quite a long one, and when I’ve finished it you shall look up and smile and say ‘All’s well.’ Listen. You are of your generation. I wrote a little book once about your generation, the generation which is coming into possession, and mine, the generation which is handing over and passing away. I called mine the Rump and yours the Purge. (You remember your Cromwell history? Odd that Pride’s Purge was that original Purge; how little did I think — .) Yes, the Purge and the Rump, and you people of the Purge are as different from us of the Rump as it is possible for two races of the human-kind to be.

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You've brought revolution into every field of thought, into morals, manners, art, literature, and you've done it because, most rightly as I think, you think with your heads and not with your hearts, we of the Rump the reverse. You of the Purge see hard and you see clear. You make no excuses, no explanations, either for or about others, or, on any account, for or about yourselves. You cut away all the sentiment from everything you touch and deal only with the bone. You don't slop over.

"Apply the principle to the case. If you were of the Rump, Jo, you'd be all clingy and swimmy and vapoury and be sentimentalizing over 'better an old man's darling than a young man's plaything.' Thank God you're of the Purge. You're stripped and swift and hard. You see with the eyes of the morning and not with the eyes of the softly-shaded lamplight rubbish; and you're able, aren't you, to realize damn well — in the free language of the Purge damn well — that life with Clive is your heart's life and that this other thing your mind has touched has just been an aeroplane's bump into a pocket, a sudden drop into a nothingness and not unpleasant if you've a steady stomach but by God an ugly horror if you suddenly found that the pocket had no bottom and you were booked to crash."

Much more in similar appeal to the clear judgement, to the cold wisdom, of her generation he told her — that in ten years, when he would be approaching seventy, she and Clive, as virile then as now, would yet be in their thirties; that himself had touched but the veriest fringe of her life,



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Clive its innermost centre now for nearly seven years. "And look, Jo, how designedly created for one another you two have always been. Love, it has been said, consists in this, that two solitudes greet and touch and protect each other. Clive's solitude behind that Slammed Door of his, yours imposed on you by that step-trinity of yours, in a destined complement such as that is it conceivable that your solitude ever should contemplate desertion of his?"

He touched her knee again. "You're of your generation, be true to it. No compromise with Rumpish traitors; no betrayal of Purge pals. No crazy crash, Jo; the pocket's closed; you're out of it and streaming up gaining altitude again. Here endeth the lecture; look up and smile and say 'All's well.' "

For a minute's space she maintained her pose, hands to breasts, head bowed. Then slowly her right hand's fingers edged within her left wrist's cuff. A wisp of handkerchief came out. She touched her eyes with it, then let fall her hands to her lap and looked up at him with gentle smile.

"Thanks, X."

He patted her hands. "Brave Jo." He said briskly, "Tell me some things. How are you here?"

But she gave a smallest negation of her head. "I think that I'm not quite up to telling things. It fitted; I was able to have the car." She got up. "I'll go, I think."

He made also to rise.

## AS ONCE YOU WERE

"No, you stay there," she said. "I'd like just to go."

She went towards the door.

Now suddenly, bade not to move, he found himself also as it were forbidden words. Had she responded to the briskness with which, as putting behind them all that had been between them, he had changed voice in "Tell me some things," he had continued it, he felt — inquiring of her how Clive had taken her his news, how long they had had together, what plans for their marriage they had made. Words had been put in his mouth while, compassionating her, he had addressed her, words of conventional suggestion as automatically would have come now that in his difficulty that other influences had filled his need. But she had not responded to his change of tone. He had brought her, he now had the feeling, to the end of a passage, and she was very tired and must drift away and there was nothing, she seemed to tell him, he could do further to help her. He was bereft, he found, of words. He only could watch her going.

Then she stopped and turned towards him.

"But I've said nothing," she quietly spoke. "Mine's not been told, my part in all of this."

His spell was broken. "The Purge doesn't tell," he said. He stood up. "It never explains," he smiled, "never excuses. I told you that."

She went to the door. "At least, then, there was to thank you. This unheard-of thing that you've done —"

He went to her. "'With all my worldly goods,'" he said

## HE FINDS

lightly. "There's no acknowledgement response by the bride."

She had drooped her eyes. She raised them to his. "There's just, then," she spoke, "good-bye to all that."

He said steadily "That's it. That's absolutely all there is."

She turned from him and put both her hands to the handle of the door. "Well, then —" she said, and again, fumbling with the latch, her head drooped. "Well, then —"

He put a hand to her arm to turn her about that he might see her face. "There's something else?" he asked.

She suffered him to turn her. "There's one thing. Good-bye to all that, but there's just one scrap I'd like to take out of it."

"What, Jo?"

"That verse. I'd like to remember that."

He dropped his hand from her arm. When he had spoken the verse to her he had been speaking with the level assurance of the influences which throughout had directed his speech. Now as ever since her rising from the couch he was abandoned of them. He averted his head. That she might not see that his face, as he felt, was working, he turned and went from her a step. His back to her, "Trying to remember it," he said. "It's by an American poet" — he knew his voice was unsteady — "Christopher Morley . . . had to alter . . . the first line."

Now he had controlled himself, he thought.

He turned. "Like this, wasn't it?" He went close to her.

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"You came into my mind, I found you there.  
You were my poem then, for in my heart  
Lovelier than a sonnet, you made rhyme  
And I had memorized you unaware."

And she made a motion then, almost imperceptible, of raising her face to his, bent down towards her; and he caught his arms about her and they stood then, heart pressed to heart, lips joined to lips, all senses one.

She disengaged herself. "No, don't come."

"I won't then."

"No. Good-bye."

"Good-bye."

THE END







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